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PAGE 66: //FEATURE //DARKWATCH//EXCLUSIVE

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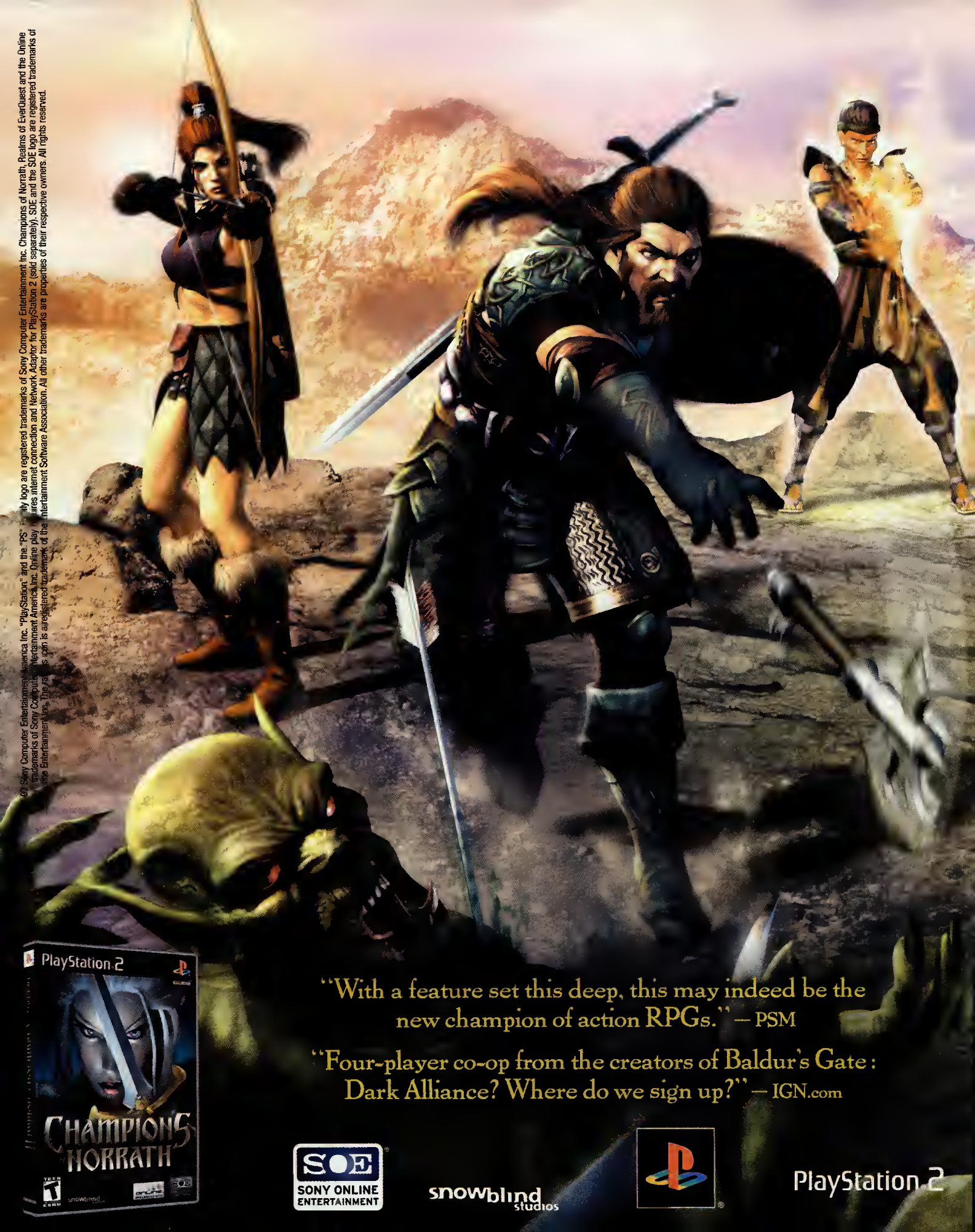

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9.6 out of 10 - Official Xbox Magazine

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GET MORE FROM YOUR GAMES

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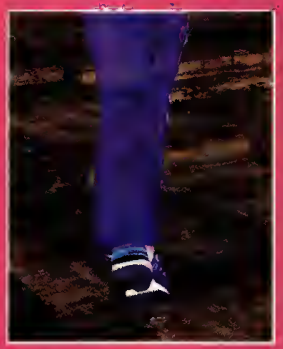

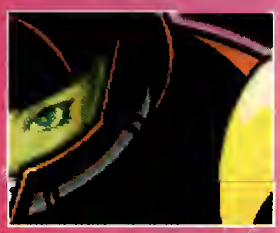

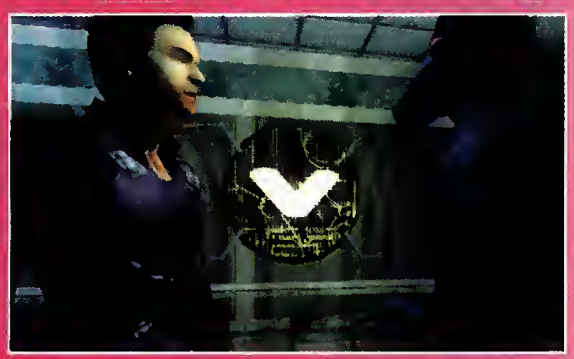

GMR

GET MORE FROM YOUR GAMES

Dear GMR,

This is one of the most difficult letters I've ever had to write. Even more difficult than the one I wrote to the queen, telling her that I had accidentally embossed the word "Dunlop" on the forehead of one of her beloved corgi dogs by reversing over it with a Range Rover.

The fact is, *GMR*, it's over between us.

Before you get upset, I want you to know that it's not you, it's me. Though I loved you more than I could say, as you know, I was previously committed to another magazine called *Xbox Nation*. And though this past year has been one of the happiest of my life, I know that I must return and finish what I started. That, and my boss has told me that if I don't, I'll never so much as write a review for a Majesco game in this town again.

I know that you know that I know that you know that I've been unfaithful, so I won't try to deny it. That thing with the tech magazine was just a fling and meant nothing to me, though I admit I adored her fonts. And once when you called me and I said I was working late, I was actually reading *EGM*, adding up her three review scores for each game and then working out the average. If any consolation, you remarked about the same.

Yes, this is my last issue. I leave you, your sterling crew, and your 900,000 subscribers in the extraordinary hands of Tom Byron, who's been editing videogame magazines since the time of the Romans. I wish him the very best of British luck.

Anyway, bye, and thanks for the memories—especially that time when James [illegible] reviewed a PC game. Oh, how we laughed!

Simon Cox_Editor-in-Chief

COUP DE TAT
SIMON COX
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Rap Sheet: After 12 months of listening to, how shall we say, *variations* of the English language (e.g. "Erm," "Fackin' 'ell," "Roight," "It's an eight, isn't it?" etc.), the *GMR* staff decided the time was right to fit our former don, Sharp-Dressed Simon, for a pair of cement loafers. Kenneth Coles, naturally. *What?* They were having a frickin' sale!

STRAIGHT MAN REPORT
JAMES MIELKE
EXECUTIVE EDITOR

Rap Sheet: "No women, no children" are the mantra of *GMR*'s resident "cleaner." The rest of youse can, oh, I dunno, juggehdaboudit—if you get my drift. Ain't that right, Johnny?

SLEEPIN' WITH THE FISHES
DAVID CHEN
MANAGING EDITOR

Rap Sheet: After one too many frickin' botched jobs, David "Balls" Chen was found floating down the Potomac toward *Xbox Nation*, bloated on his own merriment and effluvia.

MADE MAN
DM "CORNELIUS" PRICE
NEWS EDITOR

Crap Sheet: No one's quite sure who the heavy—known only as "Poop"—actually works for, but we're pretty sure it's Cypress Hill. Weren't ready for that, were ya, Paul?

MUSICAL YOOT
ANDREW [illegible]
WRITER

Rap Sheet: Not for nothing, but when you combine [illegible] three of the womanizer, a boozer, and [illegible] who can loosely be described as "one" with the ukelele [illegible] get the frickin' Fist. *Ayyyyyy!*

TINY NUTS
GERRY SERRANO
ART DIRECTOR

Rap Sheet: Once the don of a mighty clan of Filipino ninjas whose use of mud as a stealth device was legendary, the Serrano father's only remaining friends are the voices inside his head.

THE PASTY PASTRY MISTRESS OF DEATH
CAROLINE KING
DESIGNER

Cookie Sheet: Ain't no sack o' flour safe from this woman. She's been known to turn a sturdy bag of Gold Medal in a weeping tray of Toll House cookies in the time it takes you to read this box.

GMR

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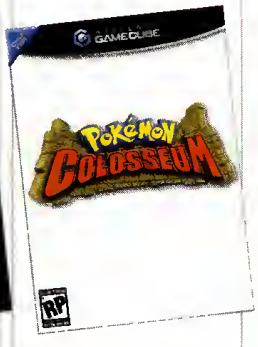

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POST

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FOR THE SAKE OF COMPARISON

I just received Issue #11 of your wonderful mag, and once again you've outdone yourselves. Upon reading a review of *Ratchet and Clank: Going Commando*, I noticed that in the "Wait For It" category you wrote, "Wait For It: *Jak II*," but in Issue #10 there was a review for *Jak II*, and there it was..."Wait For It: *Ratchet and Clank: Going Commando*." So what gives, *GMR*? Are you guys actually recommending games for gamers or is it just a crapshoot, flip-of-the-coin kinda deal?

_Yumbo McGillicutty

Well you see, Yumbo, that little section...hold on...

OK, I'm on my second issue here, and there's one thing I love about your magazine: I'm pretty sure you've got the all-time one-liner kings doing the writing. So here's where the complaint comes. I'm not sure if this issue has been addressed already, but here it goes: In the three-line sum-ups at the end of each review, why bother using games from other platforms? In the *Castlevania: LOI* review you said, "Wait For It: *Ninja Gaiden*." Now I can see what you're doing here, and in general I like the idea, but I don't own multiple platforms. So please, for the love of good journalism, stop putting games from other platforms in these little sum-ups (unless, of course, it is a multiplatform game).

_Brant

You and Mr. McGillicutty must be on the same wavelength. Whenever we say "Wait For It" and...sigh...hold on...

I personally have nothing against people reviewing games—that's why I get your magazine, along with *EGM* and *PSM*. What bothers me though is the "Better Than," "Not As Good As," and "Wait For It" portions of the reviews. As I see it, the only merit they have is in ticking people off for no real reason. On several occasions I noticed comparisons to games that have nothing in common. In the *Shining Soul 2* review, James Mielke said it was better than *Pinball of the Dead*, not as good as *Sonic Pinball Party*, and that its best feature is that it didn't require quarters. None of this makes any sense. Why is he comparing an action-RPG to pinball games? What does "hack-n-slash" have to do with "hitting a ball with paddles"? It just doesn't make any sense.

Or how about *Mario & Luigi*—Andrew Pfister said that it was better than *Golden Sun: The Lost Age* and easier than *Final Fantasy Tactics Advance*. The only thing I can see that this comparison would do is just tick off *Golden Sun* fans. They may both be RPGs, but they're made for different types of RPGers. And why is its difficulty being compared to that of a strategy-RPG? A strategy-RPG is a much different playing experience than a normal RPG. This is what I think is really dragging down *GMR*'s credibility: pointless comparisons. Comparing games with very little to nothing in common, then telling us to just ignore the product and wait for something *GMR* deems is better is just amateurish.

_Marf

Did you guys coordinate these letters? Starting from the top: Whenever we say "Wait For It," we're not telling you to ignore the game being reviewed, we're trying to pique your interest in similar games. Note that we often use "Wait For It" with games that receive good reviews. As for suggesting similar games for other systems, we don't decide what game goes where. All we can do is assume that our readers are interested in gaming as a whole—that's why we're a multiplatform magazine. And Marf, your hostility is unfounded. The pinball references in the *Shining Soul 2* review were unfortunate typos, mysteriously left over from our review of *Pokémon Pinball* in Issue #10. And if *Golden Sun* fans are annoyed because we point out that *Mario & Luigi* (a 9) is better than *Golden Sun: The Lost Age* (an 8)...well, they really shouldn't have their feelings hurt by simple arithmetic. Nor should you. I➔

this game is so much better than Madden

MESSAGE BOARD JUNKIES!

Male-centric basic cable network SpikeTV recently held its first annual videogame awards show. What did the MBJ's think about the ordeal? Let's just hope there isn't a second annual show....

"*WWE SmackDown* winning for best [illegible] damn fighting game, in a year that witnessed the release of *Virtua Fighter 4: Evolution* and *Soul Calibur 2*!? Insanity.
–Krispy

I hope this sorta thing never happe[illegible] again in history, but wasn't it annual? NNNOOOOOOO!
–Dump_Monkey

I still can't come to terms with all this. But I finally accept it as how things are. Those results represent the [illegible]jority. God. It pisses me off so much.
–Alt_Ctrl_Del

The only re[illegible] support having a videogame [illegible] would be TechTV.
–brockdn

I don't think I'll ever pay to see POD live.
–Slipé

Andrew W. K. rocking out...IN A WHEELCHAIR! LOLOLOL! Now I've seen funny...but this is another dimension of funny...quite possibly the dimension of funny where Andrew W. K. is the queen of it. Too funny..
–ErikWaters

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BUSTED!

Here's a quote from page 36 of Issue #12: "Here at *GMR*, we preview games a little differently. To ensure that our previews are as relevant as possible, we feature only titles that will be released within six months." Now, here's a quote from your preview of *Killzone* on the very next page: "It's promising that, while still a year off, *Killzone* is already highly playable." There seems to be a discrepancy here. Explain.

_Matt Brady

Explanation: We let our excitement get the better of us and jumped the gun on the *Killzone* preview. We goofed, sorry. But hey, we had the chance to play it, so we took it. It was for your benefit, honest!

SEX! NOW THAT WE'VE GOT YOUR ATTENTION...

I'm writing in for two main reasons: the first is to express my utter disgust at the entire gaming world. It's a man's world. I love *Soul Calibur* as much as the next gal (granted, I'm a little peeved that all the major female characters have had breast implants over the last four years; heck, I'm surprised Taki can still walk), but I think it's time the gaming world evolved and started catering to women, or at the very least treated us as equals. Violence and scantily clad girls (still a step up from no female characters at all...I think) are all well and good, but what about games featuring diplomacy and scantily clad men? Granted, it wouldn't be as satisfying as tearing Nightmare to shreds with Talim, but I think people underestimate the power of games like *Harvest Moon*. I loved *Harvest Moon*. Earning the money to buy that extra cow was really rewarding; I felt like I was accomplishing something—building something, rather than destroying it. Therein lies my second point. *Harvest Moon: Friends of Mineral Town* was reported as being boring and repetitive. I highly disagree. I find dungeon crawlers to be equally repetitive but also overwhelmingly pointless, and everybody loves those. In conclusion, stop looking at Ivy like that. I'm sure she's a respectable, accomplished woman. And play *Harvest Moon*. Deep down you'll like it. You'll like it good.

_Kiera Feminist Fighter X-2 (Gerg's gaming girlfriend)

(By the way, if you don't publish this, yet you published BOTH of my boyfriend's weird letters, I will know that the men-run dictatorship of this magazine is SEXIST through and through. Remember: With great power comes great responsibility.)

Excellent thoughts, Kiera. And let the record show that the men-run *GMR* dictatorship is not sexist, but sexy through and through.

WE'VE GOT THE TOUCH

GMR...You got me so desperate to get my letter in the magazine you made me resort to this. I am suing you for magazine sexual harassment. Your magazine touched me in my happy place.

_A Proud Suing Subscriber

Maybe a little *too* sexy....

→ New EIC Tom Jo...er, Byron. Like what you see, ladies?

I like that it's a thing, but I wish it were in other people's hands.
–kajika

Then again, a pile of burning babies would look pretty appealing after watching that wretched excuse for an awards show.
–DQ

I bet the guys were like: "Hey! Lets put on some white guy who can't rap wortha crap and some guy who has six gajillion tattoos on the drums!! That'll impress the kids—especially the ones who have no idea what the word "talent" means!!"
–dustinmyles

Sounds like they enjoyed it! Good job, SpikeTV!

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SOULCALIBUR II

TEEN
T
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Violence
Suggestive Themes

PlayStation.2

REFLECTIONS OF TRADITION. Exclusively on the PlayStation 2 computer entertainment system, Tekken legend Heihachi jumps into the Soulcalibur II arena. The battle will be hard fought with old Soulcalibur favorites and new masters ready to battle anyone with the guts. And the fighting continues with over 10 modes of play, including the new Weapon Master Mode, giving you the chance to unlock hundreds of weapons, costumes, arenas and hidden characters.

A gladiator hungry for revenge. A young girl haunted by the ghosts of her past. Together, the two must unite and race to protect the Mana Tree from those who would turn its awesome powers to dark ends. Choose your hero, uncover the secret of the Mana Tree and save the ancient wellspring of all life in the epic Sword of Mana.

GAME BOY ADVANCE

SWORD of MANA

EVERYONE
E
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Fantasy Violence

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who are you?

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PS2

FRONT

GMR NEWS NETWORK

IN THE NEWS

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The *Alien Quadrilogy* makes us never want to get on a spaceship

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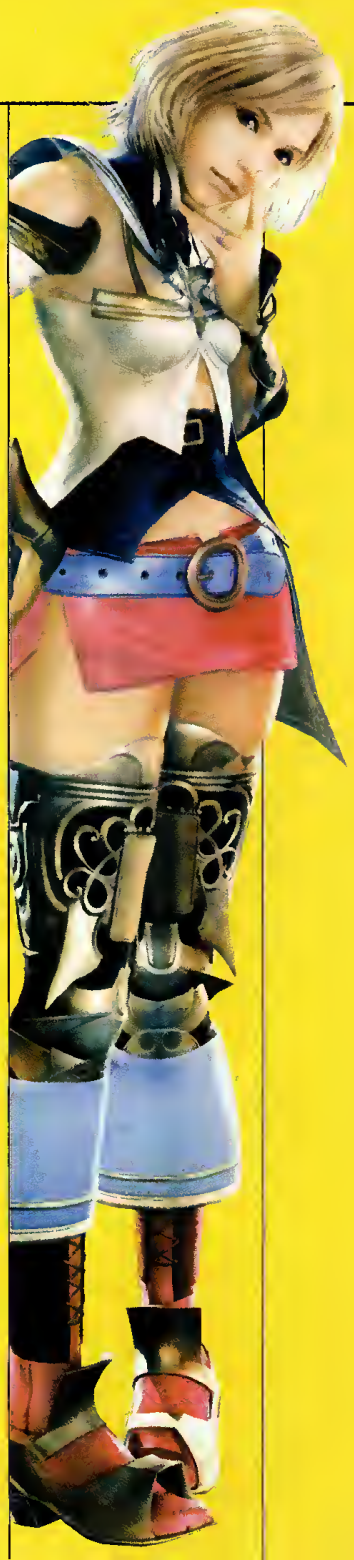
Naruto will grab you by the Dragonballs



← Expect a darker story line and more strategic battles than in *Final Fantasy*s past. Series director Yasumi Matsuno's past work (*FF Tactics*, *Vagrant Story*) suggests that this 12th *Fantasy* will mark a departure for the series. Good times.

PS2

FINAL FANTASY XII

FIRST FACTS FROM THE LAND OF IVALICE...AND A TOPLESS BOY!

JAPAN

Recently in Japan, Square Enix formally unveiled *Final Fantasy XII* to the world. Held for both the media and consumers lucky enough to win a contest to attend, the press conference consisted mostly of speeches by Square and Sony personnel, a screening of the *FFXII* trailer, and a short Q and A session with the development team.

Perhaps the most surprising detail that came out of the press conference is that you might have seen *FFXII*'s world before—in *Final Fantasy Tactics Advance*. When *FFTA*'s Ritz proclaims that the world of Ivalice is just like that *Final Fantasy* game she played, she is referring to *FFXII*.

That surprise arose out of the fact that *FFXII* is under the direction of Yasumi Matsuno and his team at Product Development Division 4. This is the same team behind such classics as *Vagrant Story*, *Final Fantasy Tactics*, and, well, *Final Fantasy Tactics Advance*.

Unfortunately, Square Enix didn't release many details about *FFXII*. Then again, it's slated for a summer release in Japan, which translates to a 2005 Stateside release, so the company has plenty of time to give out more info. What we do know: While it's not the exact same Ivalice as in *FFTA* (Art director Hideo Minaba says, "I would say that this is another version, maybe, of what you've seen previously. We'd like to show a different version of Ivalice."), it features bangaas and vieras and is set during the backdrop of a massive war between Arcadia and Dalmasca.

It's been confirmed that Vaan, that effeminate-looking fellow, is indeed the main character. The other released character, Ashe, is supposedly the princess of Dalmasca, and when the Arcadian Empire starts occupying Dalmasca, she starts a rebellion against Arcadia and runs into the young, carefree air-pirate wannabe Vaan. The most interesting story detail is that the Judge, a character from *FFTA*, has a much more important role this time (heck, he's part of *FFXII*'s logo). Matsuno says the Judge was an "impartial police court" in *FFTA*, but for *FFXII*, the Judge is a member of an "order of knights who inspire terror." At one point in the trailer, a lippy bangaa starts mouthing off at a random knight, only to be verbally slapped by the very Vader-esque Judge who enters the room. The few screenshots we've seen

show three characters (two humans and one viera) in your party; of course, no one at Square Enix was ready to comment on the battle system. When asked, "With Matsuno making games like *FFT* and *Ogre Battle*, would *FFXII* be a more strategic game?" Minaba replied, "I leave it up to your assumption—it is too early to say." Finally, the most interesting confirmation is that the camera, traditionally static, will be rotatable, à la *FFXI*'s—with a limited first-person mode (just to look around) implemented as well.

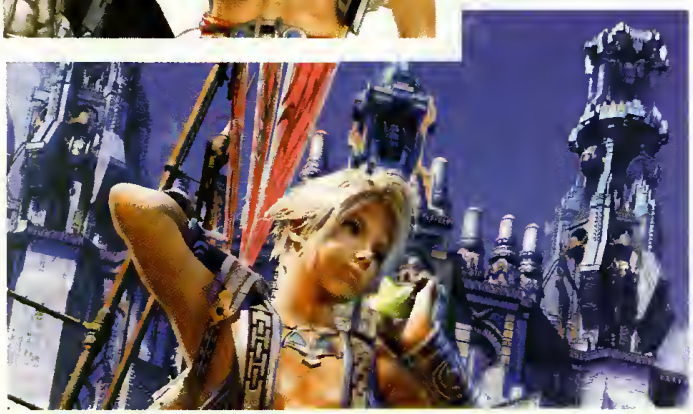
One of the most interesting events at Square Enix's press conference took place when Hironobu Sakaguchi gave his words of support to the game. Long considered the grandfather of *Final Fantasy*, he's been keeping quiet since *Final Fantasy VIII*. Yet he had nothing but praise for Matsuno and his team, saying that he loves the worlds Matsuno creates, and that "*Ogre Battle* was a true masterpiece."

Already, one can see the dark touches Matsuno brings to his titles. Even though Vaan looks downright silly and the rest of the game has the requisite *Final Fantasy* beauty, there are some incredibly dark scenes in the trailer—mostly of knights on chocobos running down and goring other soldiers (yes, you read that right, Matsuno made chocobos badass). Matsuno admits he was influenced a lot by ancient Rome, and the parts of the trailer featuring dark battles and gladiatorial arenas confirms that. If nothing else, *Final Fantasy XII* will probably be the most unique, and possibly darkest, *Final Fantasy* yet.

_Thierry Nguyen

XB
PC
PS2
GBA
GC

← You'd think from the looks of him, that he is one of Tetsuya Nomura's women, er, we mean "men." But despite the flowing blonde locks, this character design is actually the work of Akihiko Yoshida, character designer for *Final Fantasy Tactics*, among other games. Will our hero ever don a shirt? It'll be a while before we find out. *FFXII* isn't due to hit the United States until 2005.



_More info at www.ff12.com

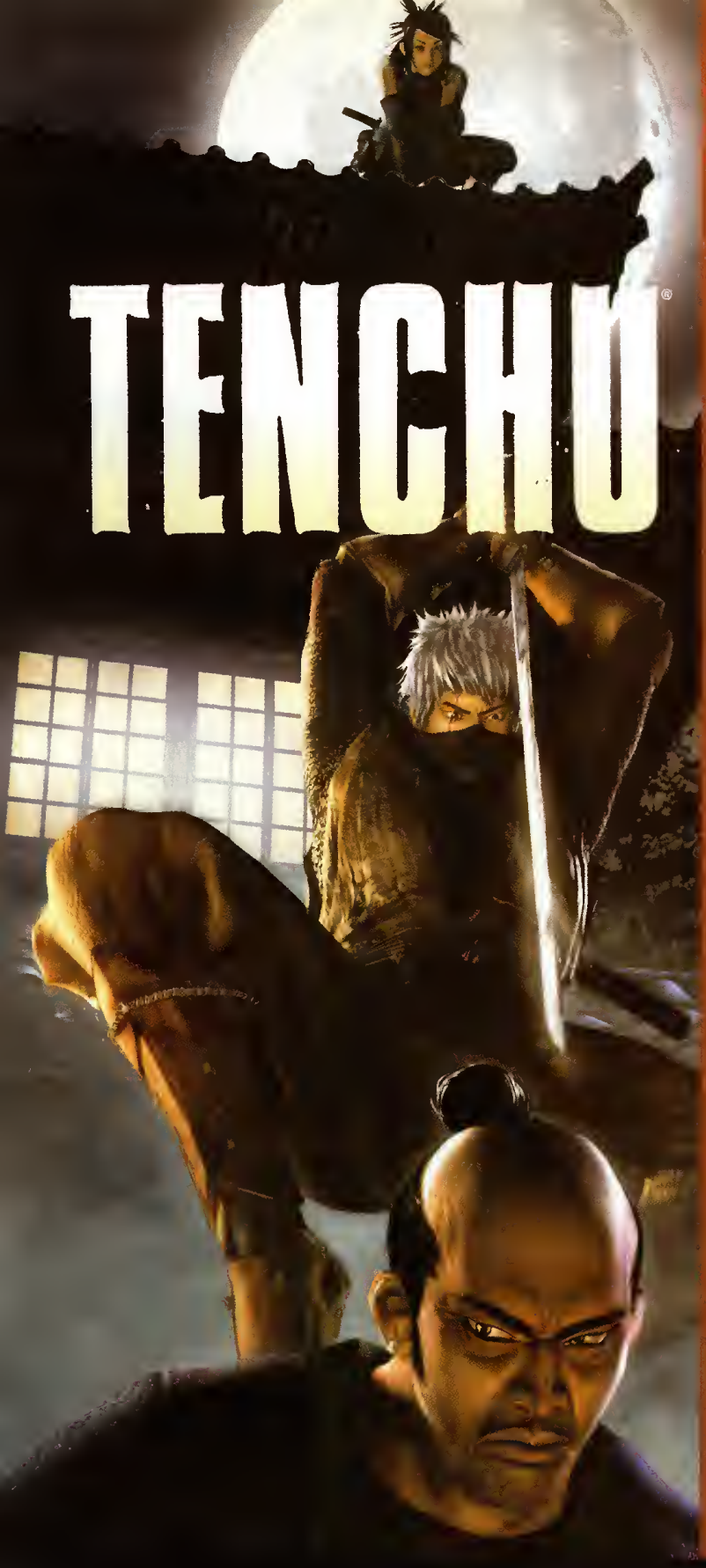
GAMEPORT VITAL GAME INFO. NOW BOARDING...

Arrivals COMING SOON

SYSTEM	ETA	TITLE	HOW HOT?
PS2, XB, GC	JAN	**NFL STREET** For those who think *NFL Blitz* sold out	4
PS2	JAN	**BALDUR'S GATE: DARK ALLIANCE II** Why do so many games have subtitles these days?	4
PS2	JAN	**SYPHON FILTER: OMEGA STRAIN** Seriously, why?	2
GC	FEB	**FINAL FANTASY: CRYSTAL CHRONICLES** The moogles are coming! The moogles are coming!	4
GBA	FEB	**METROID: ZERO MISSION** Yay! A new *Metroid* is coming sooner than we thought	4
PS2	FEB	**PSI OPS** It's all in your head.	2
PS2	FEB	**CHAMPIONS OF NORRATH: REALMS OF EQ** We are the champions . of wherever this place is	4
XB	FEB	**BREAKOOWN** We're a little nervous about this one....	3
PS2, XB, GC	FEB	**STARCRAFT GHOST** Goliath go boom.	4
PC	FEB	**FAR CRY** On an island in the sun, we'll be shooting lots of guns.	3
PS2, XB	FEB	**NBA BALLERS** Go 1-on-1 with the NBA's blingiest of ballers	2
PS2, XB, GC	MAR	**SPLINTER CELL: PANOORA TOMORROW** Hey, look! It's a bunch of games about...	5
GC	MAR	**METAL GEAR SOLID: THE TWIN SNAKES** secret agents and covert ops that involve	5
PS2, XB, GC	MAR	**JAMES BONO: EVERYTHING OR NOTHING** ..sneaking around and blowing stuff up!	4
PC	MAR	**EVERQUEST II** Good-bye, whatever's left of your social life	4
PC	MAR	**THE SIMS 2** Ditto.	4

DEPARTURES OUT NOW

SYSTEM	TITLE	GMR SCORE
GC	**MARIO KART: DOUBLE DASH!!** Waluigi's Stadium owns our souls	10/10
GBA	**MARIO & LUIGI** The Tanoomba needs to be in every Mario game from here on out	9/10
ALL	**LORD OF THE RINGS: THE RETURN OF THE KING** An outstanding movie-licensed game...we likes it	9/10
PS2, XB, GC	**MEDAL OF HONOR: RISING SUN** No medals are given for a merely satisfactory performance.	7/10
PS2, XB, GC	**PRINCE OF PERSIA** Excellent, even if the camera can be a royal pain	8/10
ALL	**NEED FOR SPEED UNDERGROUND** Fun gambling tip. Race your friends for real pink slips	9/10
GBA	**SHINING SOUL 2** It's like an on-the-go *Diablo*	7/10
XB	**GRABBED BY THE GHOULIES** Let go, please	6/10
PC	**COMMANDOS 3** An unreasonably difficult challenge. Even the tutorial kicks our ass	5/10
PC	**FINAL FANTASY XI** Includes the expansion pack *Rise of the Zilart*. That's value, friends.	8/10
PC	**MAX PAYNE 2** With a new and innovative "bullet-time" feature. Er, wait...	7/10
XB	**RAINBOW SIX 3** Patiently waiting for the comically titled *Rainbow Six 6*	8/10
PS2	**.HACK//QUARANTINE** As long as this isn't the first *.hack* you play, you're fine	7/10
XB	**LEGACY OF KAIN: DEFIANCE** The legacy of moderately above average games lives on	7/10
PS2, XB, GC	**TRUE CRIME: STREETS OF L.A.** Nick Kang, cop...*on the edge*. Edge of what, we're not sure	7/10
XB	**ARMED & DANGEROUS** We prefer our sharks semi-automatic.	9/10



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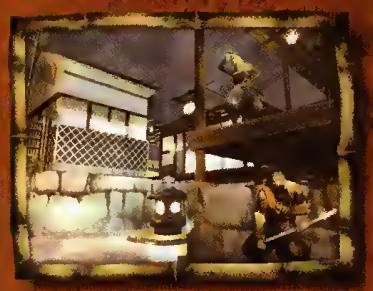

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returnfromdarkness.com

MATURE 17+ M CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Blood and Gore
Intense Violence

XBOX LIVE

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ACTIVISION

activision.com

INFOMANIA!
THE LATEST ON...

ONIMUSHA BW

Just before going to press, Capcom sent us a playable copy of its upcoming 3D fighting game *Onimusha Blade Warriors*. Featuring all the characters from the first two *Onimusha* games, *Blade Warriors* is to PS2 what *Smash Bros.* is to GameCube. Players start off with a limited selection of characters, but finishing the story mode with the default roster unlocks extra characters, including some surprise guest stars from series director Keiji Inafune's past.

The game's graphics are sharp, and the action is fast. Plus, each character plays differently enough to please all types of players. Due out in a couple months, *Blade Warriors* should appease *Onimusha* fans needing a quick fix before *Onimusha 3* ships in the fall of next year.

XB

PC

PS2

CLICKS
GO HERE NOW, PILGRIM

WWW.VIDEO-FENKY.COM

Video Fenky is the virtual home of 1UP.com editor Kevin Gifford, and one of the best places on the Web to find obscure yet compelling gaming news, especially from Japan. Mr. Gifford's translation skills can help you prove to your nerdy friends that, indeed, you know more than they do.

[SCREEN]

DOA ALIENATION

RIPLEY'S BELIEVE IT OR NOT

RATED R | NINE DISCS | DIRECTED BY VARIOUS

Be you lucky or light-fingered, beg, borrow, or steal this sprawling (albeit poorly packaged) collection of one of sci-fi's strongest legacies. Exhaustively thorough, this nine-disc compilation includes four decidedly different films—*Alien*, *Aliens*, *Alien 3*, and *Alien Resurrection*—created by four equally dissimilar directors.

Presented in original and alternate forms, each film is accompanied by dozens of interesting featurettes that document every aspect of production. The requisite trailers and cross-promotional claptrap are relegated to the ninth disc, which also includes an endearing bit on a film buff whose collection of movie props will make you green with envy.

Unsurprisingly, the sweetest treat is the immaculately restored edition of the seminal sci-fi shocker *Alien* (1979). Ridley Scott's obsessive direction, coupled with Swiss surrealist H.R. Giger's invaluable additions to the genre, makes this a chilling, captivating, and perfectly paced marriage of style, substance, and shock.

The absolute embodiment of technophiliac James Cameron's signature style, *Aliens* (1986) ups the machismo and machine-gun fire considerably, while also bringing breadth and depth to the film's roster of characters. It also, incidentally, set the groundwork for practically every first-person shooter ever made.

Chalk it up to some questionable directorial casting or perhaps Hollywood's heavy-handed love for CGI, but for whatever reason, the series started to stutter with 1991's *Alien 3* (directed by the then-inexperienced David Fincher), teetering further with 1997's *Resurrection* (helmed by *City of Lost Children*'s Jean-Pierre Jeunet). The later films don't include proper director's cuts, but substantially altered versions of both offer interesting looks at these entertaining—but ultimately uneven—follow-ups.

That the first two films (and, consequently, the series) hold up so incredibly well in spite of the later films' flaws is a testament to their greatness; they're a pleasure to see again and again—not because of their classic status, but because they're simply so damn good. One would be hard-pressed to see a return to form from this year's *Aliens vs. Predator* (courtesy of *Mortal Kombat*'s Paul Anderson), which means there's no better time than now to find out what the fuss is all about.

Special features: You want special features? You've got 'em. In fact, each extras disc is packed with so many documentaries, galleries, and trailers, you might not live to see them all.

→ As with the recent OVO repackaging of the *Indiana Jones* trilogy, it's a rare treat to see candid footage from the first two films that hearkens back to a time when not every aspect of production was meant to bear the careful, frame-by-frame scrutiny that OVOs provide.

PLAYSTATION KNOWLEDGE
THEY KNOW STUFF SO YOU DON'T HAVE TO!

JOHN DAVISON

NO SHOWS

Things didn't quite go the way everyone expected them to at the end of 2003. Games we thought would be huge weren't, and games we didn't expect to sell in large numbers suddenly performed incredibly well.

Take *FIFA 2004*, for example. By the end of November, it had sold almost twice as many copies as the previous *FIFA* game and was ahead of *Ratchet & Clank: Going Commando* and numerous other titles on the sales charts. There's no arguing that it's an excellent game, but soccer has never moved American gamers like it does Europeans—at least not until this year. Meanwhile, Ubisoft's *Prince of Persia*, a game universally hailed as the second coming by every games hack on the planet, failed to make an impact on the EB Games Top 10 list.

In truth, lots of games that were expected to sell in the millions failed to reach such lofty expectations. Why? Publishers believe that PS2 should be cheaper by now, and that if Sony had dropped the price before the holidays, there would be more new gamers running around, eager to take a lucky dip on new franchises and big sequels. This, coupled with the fact that every publisher released its best stuff within a six-week window, means that there was just too much choice. Let's hope we don't see it happen again in 2004

John Davison is Editor-in-Chief of the Official U.S. PlayStation Magazine.

THE SUFFERING™

PRISON IS HELL

"...a gore-drenched excursion into hair-raising territory"
– GamePro

"Midway's action/horror title could be the most gruesome videogame ever"
– IGN.COM

THE FEAR. THE VIOLENCE. THE HORROR.

MATURE 17+
M
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Blood and Gore
Drug Reference
Intense Violence
Strong Language

PlayStation.2

XBOX

MIDWAY

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NINTENDO
KNOWLEDGE
THEY KNOW STUFF SO YOU DON'T HAVE TO!

MARK MACDONALD

DIS CONNECT

His first column for *GMR* and he's already dissin' Nintendo? Look, it's not that I'm against the concept of hooking a GBA to a GameCube—the radar in *Splinter Cell* and the various *Animal Crossing* extras are perfect examples of how Nintendo's precious "connectivity" can add unique bonus value to a game.

What bothers me is the disturbing trend of Cube games that require linking up for no good reason. Yeah, it's cool that games like *Final Fantasy: Crystal Chronicles* and *Pokémon Colosseum* include connectivity features, but making GBAs mandatory for multiplayer? Absoludicrous. Unlike in *Pac-Man* and *Zelda: Tetra's Trackers*, having a separate handheld screen is not crucial to these games' core gameplay; the option to use a Cube controller easily could have been added.

Working at a videogame magazine, I'm surrounded by hardcore game geeks, and yet even I have trouble rounding up three people, four GBAs, and four link cables for a gaming session. Forcing connectivity in these games is like making people sit through the deleted scenes and making-of documentary to watch a movie on DVD. Either make hooking up the GBAs a truly integral part of the gameplay or make it optional.

_Mark MacDonald is Executive Editor of *Electronic Gaming Monthly*.

GBA

GC

PLUG AND PLAY
IS DISCOVER THE HOLY GRAIL FOR PC GAMES?

U.S.A

Imagine dropping a PC game into a console and just playing it. We always considered it an impossible dream, but it appears some guys never got the message. A company called DISC has been working on just such a technology for 10 years, and now it has a patent to prove it.

The first DISCover system is set to debut at the Consumer Electronics Show this January in Las Vegas. PC manufacturers Apex and Alienware are expected to show different versions of the unit, but both devices will do the same thing: play PC games, DVDs, CDs, MP3s, and more. Both units will support S-Video, keyboards, USB controllers, a mouse, and online connectivity via Ethernet and modem. The $400 Apex unit will use a 1.4GHz Pentium 4 chip with Nforce graphics; Alienware's hardware is expected to use faster components, but the equipment hasn't been finalized yet.

DISC says that its technology will play any Windows XP game. The company has support from Microsoft on next-generation usability features, and it plans to use GameSpy Arcade for online multiplayer matching.

Ah, but what about patches, DirectX, and other downloading inconveniences associated with PC gaming? DISC has a novel approach—once connected to the Internet, DISCover recognizes your installed games and automatically downloads patches and updates to your game folder free of charge.

The DISCover is a dedicated device (you can't use the Windows OS). But if it can make PC gaming drop-and-play simple, it could be a great alternative to the big consoles.

_Ken Brown

_More info at www.discoverconsole.com

DRIV3R STAR POWER
HOLLYWOOD STRIKES THE GAME WORLD. AGAIN

U.S.A

Add one more piece of interactive entertainment to the increasing list of games that are plowing headfirst into the mainstream by employing the help of some big-name Hollywood talent.

Currently in production by Reflections Interactive and to be published by Atari, *DRIV3R* (formerly known as *Driver 3*) is the continuing story of undercover cop Tanner, now voiced by Michael Madsen, best remembered as Mr. Blonde from *Reservoir Dogs*. Madsen isn't new to big-name videogame voiceovers—he played mob boss Toni Cipriani in Rockstar's *Grand Theft Auto III*. Playing his partner Tobias is none other than Ving Rhames, who starred as Marsellus Wallace in *Pulp Fiction*. Rounding out the cast are *The Fast and the Furious* hottie Michelle Rodriguez and the inimitable Mickey Rourke as the leaders of a car theft ring. One can only assume that you'll be busting them for, er, grand theft auto or something....

In other *DRIV3R* news, the game will apparently not be coming to GameCube and PC as originally announced. Instead, it will make its small-screen debut on Xbox and PS2 this spring.

[BLIPS]

Sammy owns Sega

Sammy Holding Co., parent company of Sammy Corp., acquired the 39,148,600 shares of Sega stock formerly held by CSK Corporation, giving it a majority stake in Sega Corporation.

D'oh

Sega has filed suit against EA and Fox Entertainment over *The Simpsons: Road Rage*. Sega claims that the game is too similar to its once-popular *Crazy Taxi* series. Sounds like a job for Lionel Hutz.

Champions Online

Sony Online Entertainment announced that its *EQ*-themed hack-n-slasher *Champions of Norrath* will be broadband only. Why? Because it's including voice chat for up to four cooperative gamers.

[TALENT]

JAMES GREEN

MASTER OF PUPPETS

We often take things like a game character's looks and moves for granted, rarely thinking about what or whom it takes to create such believable avatars. James Green is one of those highly creative people.

James got his start in the industry when Epic (maker of *Unreal*) noticed some of his *Quake II* player models. Now he's in charge of animating and modeling Sam Fisher in *Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow*.

GMR: Tell us about some of Sam Fisher's new moves.

JG: We wanted Sam to have more freedom to move in the environment instead of limiting the world to the moves Sam could already do. The train map is a good example of this: Many new moves were made for the sole purpose of getting the most out of that map. Going outside the train, on top, underneath—everything was specific to this particular setting.

There are also new actions Sam can perform, like the swat turn. With his back to a wall, Sam can do a quick spin across a gap and remain invisible. Something we added to the offline part of *Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow* was borrowed from the online portion of the game: the ability to hang by your feet and shoot with the pistol. There are other moves that we fine-tuned to make them smoother, such as the way Sam can smoothly lower himself through a hole in the floor, and a new series of split jumps for tighter spaces.

GMR: Any cool/funny/weird moves that aren't making it into the game?

JG: Now that you mention it, yes, there are, although right from the start, they were never meant for the game. Early on, I rigged Sam for mo-cap and put some test data from my last project on him. There were the standard run, jump, shoot moves, but for laughs, I also threw on some of the female mo-cap, so there are some pretty amusing test clips of a somewhat feminine Sam dancing, putting on lipstick, and a few unmentionable actions. And no, you will never see them. (I hope, or I might get in trouble.)

AND THE WINNER IS...

SPIKE TV SHARES ITS OPINION WITH US

U.S.A.

If you're the sort who relishes taking apart awards shows after the fact, Spike TV's (allegedly) first annual Video Game Awards offered plenty of web-forum fodder. Fighting game of the year? *WWE SmackDown!* Sports game of the year? *Tony Hawk's Underground*. Racer of the year? *NASCAR Thunder*. Best movie license of the year? *Enter the Matrix*. Game of the year? Er...*Madden NFL 2004*?

Spike compensated for some oddities with awards in other categories—*Soul Calibur II* was reckoned a weaker fighting game than *SmackDown!*, but it got the nod in the Most Addictive balloting. But there were other arguments with its awards presentation, since stage appearances by Tony Hawk and Tecmo's bevy of *Dead or Alive* babes conveniently followed their big award wins. Reports from the live crowd also indicate that giving stage time to the stars of Jackass—or at least letting them get near the bar beforehand—was an ill-advised course of action.

Spike did work some stylish features into its show, building its promotional movies around fanmade machinima clips and 8-bit videogame tunes. Maybe the home-brew artists can take over the judging committee next year—they could hardly have done worse.

_D.F. Smith

_More info at www.spiketv.com

[BLIPS]

Black Isle closes

Interplay has closed down its internal RPG development house, Black Isle Studios. The developers of *Icewind Dale* and *Planescape Torment* were working on *Fallout 3*, which is now in limbo.

Harpoon IV scuttled

Ubisoft's long-in-development naval warfare simulator *Harpoon IV* has been put in dry dock. Apparently, it wasn't living up to the publisher's extremely high standards for military simulations. Grognards weep.

Gaiden pushed back

Just after press time last month, it was announced that Tecmo and Team Ninja were pushing back the release date of their highly anticipated *Ninja Gaiden* until February 2004. Keep your katanas warm.

XBOX KNOWLEDGE

THEY KNOW STUFF SO YOU DON'T HAVE TO!

EVAN SHAMOON

PART DEUX

Rumors circulating around the industry hint that Microsoft will unveil Xbox 2 at the upcoming Game Developers Conference. It is expected that the initial graphics demo and hardware specs will be shown at GDC, with more concrete hardware and games on display in May at E3...more than likely behind closed doors.

Aside from what's already fairly common knowledge—the CPU appears to be a G5 (it's a Mac!), backed up by a megapowerful graphics chip from ATI and loads of RAM—there's also a distinct possibility that Xbox 2 will not have a hard drive. Since it's an expensive component that so few Xbox games use, Microsoft seems to be strongly considering a different approach. A modular hard drive available separately, à la PlayStation 2? Memory cards based on Compact Flash/SD technology? Consider these distinct possibilities.

This bold move on Microsoft's part will surely speed up Sony's plans, whatever they may be. Signs point to PlayStation 3's Japanese unveiling taking place in April 2004, with a U.S. showing taking place in May at E3. The next console war, it seems, will be upon us sooner than expected.

_Evan Shamoon is editor-in-chief of *Xbox Nation*.

PC
KNOWLEDGE
THEY KNOW STUFF SO YOU DON'T HAVE TO!

JEFF GREEN

NO GRIPING!

These days, it's very easy to be a whiner if you're a PC-gaming type. Take me, for example. I've been whining quite a bit lately. Why? Because it is becoming more and more routine for companies to release games in console formats first and then sit on the PC releases for far too long before finally deigning to bring them out, usually after most of us stopped caring in the first place.

But you know this already, and I'm tired of whining about it. At least this month. Because it's not going to stop anytime soon. We can't go back to the "old days" because the old days are dead, friends. This isn't just some little niche hobby anymore. It's big business. Game companies want to sell games to every dumb lardass in America now, and, unfortunately for us, more dumb lardasses have TV sets than PCs. That's partially what made them dumb lardasses in the first place.

Anyway, we PC gamers do have one nice consolation prize when it comes to console ports. *The Simpsons: Hit & Run* and *Knights of the Old Republic* are two games I played this month, and they look amazing on PC—way better than they do on consoles. Yeah, they came out later, but they were worth the wait. That's about all we can ask for these days.

_Jeff Green is editor-in-chief of *Computer Gaming World*.

XB
PC
PS2
GBA
GC

GMR CHARTS

IN ASSOCIATION WITH EB GAMES electronics boutique

TOP-SELLING GAMES FOR EVERY SYSTEM FOR NOVEMBER '03

TOP 10 ALL FORMATS

RANK	TITLE	FORMAT	SCORE
01	**FINAL FANTASY X-2** Ladies Love Cool Tidus.	PS2	9
02	**GRAND THEFT AUTO DOUBLE PACK** Two murder simulators for the price of one!	XB	10
03	**NEED FOR SPEED UNDERGROUND** Mama always told us not to go street racing after it's rained.	PS2	9
04	**SOCOM II: U.S. NAVY SEALS** It's like being a real soldier—but without the crappy food and sit-ups.	PS2	9
05	**TRUE CRIME: STREETS OF L.A.** Marcellus revoked our L.A. privileges.	PS2	7
06	**MEDAL OF HONOR: RISING SUN** We like sunsets better. Not to mention kitty cats and rainbows.	PS2	7
07	**MARIO KART: DOUBLE DASH!!** Riding with mushrooms in cars.	GC	10
08	**TRUE CRIME: STREETS OF L.A.** We always get lost driving around L.A.—now we can do it from the comfort of our couch!	XB	7
09	**TONY HAWK'S UNDERGROUND** Living the life of a skateboarding legend, minus the broken collarbones.	PS2	10
10	**NEED FOR SPEED UNDERGROUND** Ever wonder what happened to the career of Vin Diesel? Yeah, neither do we.	XB	9

PS2 TOP 10

		SCORE
01	FINAL FANTASY X-2	9
02	NFS: UNDERGROUND	9
03	SOCOM II: U.S. NAVY SEALS	9
04	TRUE CRIME: STREETS OF L.A.	7
05	MEDAL OF HONOR: RISING SUN	7
06	TONY HAWK'S UNDERGROUND	10
07	LOTR: RETURN OF THE KING	9
08	WWE SMACKDOWN! HCTP	8
09	FIFA 2004	8
10	MANHUNT	6

XBOX TOP 10

		SCORE
01	GTA DOUBLE PACK	10
02	TRUE CRIME: STREETS OF L.A.	7
03	NFS UNDERGROUND	9
04	RAINBOW SIX 3	8
05	MEDAL OF HONOR: RISING SUN	7
06	COUNTER-STRIKE	6
07	PROJECT GOTHAM RACING 2	9
08	LOTR: RETURN OF THE KING	9
09	MORROWIND	8
10	STAR WARS JEDI ACADEMY	7

PC TOP 10

		SCORE
01	CALL OF DUTY	7
02	FINAL FANTASY XI	8
03	STAR WARS: KOTOR	10
04	THE SIMS: MAKIN' MAGIC	TBD
05	CIV III: CONQUESTS	TBD
06	DS: LEGENDS OF ARANNA	6
07	NFS UNDERGROUND	9
08	GTA: VICE CITY	10
09	MAX PAYNE 2	7
10	DADC: TRIALS OF ATLANTIS	TBD

GBA TOP 10

		SCORE
01	SMA4: SUPER MARIO BROS. 3	9
02	YU-GI-OH! SACRED CARDS	TBD
03	MARIO & LUIGI	9
04	FIRE EMBLEM	8
05	HARVEST MOON	7
06	FF TACTICS ADVANCE	9
07	DRAGONBALL Z: TAIKETSU	TBD
08	NAMCO MUSEUM	TBD
09	POKÉMON RUBY	7
10	SPONGEBOB SQUAREPANTS	8

GC TOP 10

		SCORE
01	MARIO KART: DOUBLE DASH!!	10
02	MARIO PARTY 5	8
03	YU-GI-OH! FALSEBOUND KING	TBD
04	LOTR: RETURN OF THE KING	9
05	TRUE CRIME: STREETS OF L.A.	7
06	TONY HAWK'S UNDERGROUND	10
07	NFS UNDERGROUND	9
08	DBZ: BUDOKAI 2	7
09	SPIDER-MAN	6
10	SUPER SMASH BROS. MELEE	9

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GAMEPLANNER | JANUARY 2004

ALL RELEASE DATES ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE. SO IT'S NOT OUR FAULT!

WHAT'S COOLER THAN BEING COOL? BEING ICE COLD!

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THUASDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
Our New Year's resolution: Maximize your entertainment quotient by 37% and increase the educational factor threefold. We'll see how that works out.				01 Wasn't there some U2 song about New Year's Day? What was it, what was it...uhhh...crap, this is going to bother us all day.	02 In the spirit of getting your new year off to a rollicking start, we've selected four films opening this month that will, in all likelihood, be absolutely terrible.	03
04	05 *Harvest Moon: A Wonderful Life* (GC), *Supercar GT* (PS2), *Corvette* (PS2), *He-Man: Defender of Grayskull* (XB), *The Fast and the Furious* (PS2), and *.hack//Quarantine* (PS2) are out today.	06 Sega's releasing *Sonic Heroes* for GameCube today, a few weeks ahead of the PS2 and Xbox versions. Why? Who knows, this is Sega we're talking about here	07	08	09 First up is *My Baby's Daddy*, starring Eddie Griffin and Michael Imperioli. Not exactly the names we think of in relation to high comedy.	10
11	12 In stores: *Star Trek: Shattered Universe* (PS2, XB) and *Fallout: Brotherhood of Steel* (PS2, XB).	13 Out now: *Combat Flight Simulator 3: Battle of Britain* (PC), *Combat Flight Simulator 3: B-17 Bomber* (PC), *Flashpoint Germany* (PC), *Breed* (PC), and *NFL Street* (PS2, XB, GC).	14 Today marks the Festival of the Ass. Seriously, the Festival of the Ass. Look it up if you don't believe us.	15	16 Next is *Torque*, starring Ice Cube. Now, we love the Cube. *Friday* is a cinematic classic and *Barbershop* was great. But come on, bikers? Meh.	17
18	19	20 *Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance 2* (PS2, XB), *Maximo vs. Army of Zin* (PS2), and *Ghost Recon: Jungle Storm* (PC) are out today.	21	22	23 *Mindhunters* stars Val Kilmer, Christian Slater, and L.L. Cool J as FBI psychoanalysts (stop laughing) who must figure out which one of them is a killer. Awesome.	24
25	26	27 *Sega GT Online* (XB), *Mafia* (PS2, XB), and *Sonic Heroes* (PS2, XB) are released today. Having a good week so far?	28	29	30 And finally, *You Got Served*, a movie about two friends who want to open a dance studio, so they enter a dance contest in hopes of...wait a minute. Is it 1983 again?	31

WWW.ROCKSTARGAMES.COM/MANHUNT

MATURE 17+
M
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Strong Language
Blood and Gore
Intense Violence

PlayStation.2

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NINJAS TWO TIME

NAAUTO—THE NEXT DAAGON BALL Z—GETS FAISKY

JAPAN

The headline is no idle boast. *Naruto*—a manga (comic book) by Kishimoto Masashi that is published in Japan by Jump Comics—is already as big as *Dragon Ball Z* in its country of origin, and it's poised to become just as popular overseas, where the name still strikes a resounding "Huh?"

The story of a group of diversified young ninjas attending—what else?—ninja school, *Naruto* focuses on the exploits of main character Uzumaki Naruto and his classmates Sasuke and Sakura, among others. As you get closer to the characters, the story expands beyond their own Leaf Village, eventually encompassing other genin (lesser ninjas) students from rival schools. Naturally, this translates into a lot of butt kicking, and two new games—*Naruto: Narultimate Hero* (PS2, Bandai) and *Naruto Gekitou Ninja Taisen 2* (GC, Tomy)—have just been released in Japan. The best part is that both games are awesome! *Narultimate Hero* is like two-player *Smash Bros.* on steroids, with some of the most amazing cel-shaded graphics you've ever seen, and the GameCube title is equally impressive but offers four-player action for even crazier ninja-fighting action.

NAAUTO: NAAULTIMATE HEAO (PS2)

↗ *Narultimate Hero*'s developer, CyberConnect, now finished with *.hack*, has returned to its roots and made a kick-ass action game on par with *Super Smash Bros. Melee*. Believe it. Word on the street is that Bandai will bring this one to the United States later in 2004. You don't want to miss it.

NAAUTO GEKITOU NINJA TAISEN 2 (GC)

↗ Tomy's four-player fighting game, developed by Eighting (*Bloody Roar*), is an extremely solid 3D fighter that, while not quite *Virtua Fighter*–quality, is still great fun to play. And it looks fantastic.

INTERNATIONAL REPORT

XB
PC
PS2
GBA
GC

HO, HO...HOI?

KILL 'EM ALL. LET HOIHOI SORT 'EM OUT!

JAPAN

"Ichigeki Sachuu! Hoihoi-San" means "Kill the Insect! Hoihoi-san." The first part makes sense, since this is a game about shooting giant bugs. The second part is the confusing bit—Hoihoi-san is a saucer-eyed cutie with soft pink hair, a charming smile, and a demure pinafore dress. Oh, and a submachine gun, too.

It would be untrue to say this looks like a contender for game of the year—the TGS demo felt like a pretty pedestrian 3D shooter—but damn if it doesn't look funnier than hell. *Hoihoi* (PS2) is the perfect icon of Japanese comic-book cuteness (drawn by *Xenosaga*'s Kunihiko Tanaka), although the samurai swords and .50-caliber HMG warp the image into something wonderfully bizarre. Chances are pretty good you won't be seeing this one in the States any time soon.

Konami's thrown in plenty of options for playing dress-up with different outfits and weapons combinations both in and out of the game—the limited-edition set includes a high-quality Hoihoi action figure with mix-and-match weapons. If you need an oddball gift this holiday for an import-loving gamer in your life, *Hoihoi* (or *Chou Aniki*, perhaps) should fit the bill perfectly.

FOXY LADY!

GMA GETS ITS HANDS ON SEGA'S SEXY SHINOBIETTE, NIGHTSHADE

JAPAN

Trust us when we say we'll do anything for a piece, and in our quest to get additional hands-on time with Sega's *Shinobi* sequel, *Nightshade*, we went all the way to a tiny kiosk in Akihabara to spend some quality time with the dashing (literally) girl in white.

As *Shinobi* (PS2) veterans will attest to, the tate (tah-tay) game mechanic of speed dashing from one enemy to another in a never-ending quest for the perfect combo is the game's bread and butter. *Nightshade* (known in Japan as *Kunoichi*, which translates to "female ninja") continues this theme with tate a-go-go, as well as the introduction of daytime levels and significantly brighter graphics. Don't let that fool you into thinking *Nightshade* is a cartoony *Shinobi* wannabe, though. The first level has you fighting on the wings of a stealth bomber weaving its way through a forest of skyscrapers. After that, you hit the ground—or rooftops—running, as heroine Hibana takes on all manner of meaty and mechanical foe just as fast as she can. We'll have deeper hands-on impressions of *Nightshade* as Sega prepares for its U.S. release this spring.

If you like *Shinobi*, you'll love *Nightshade*. Same great taste.

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FREEDOM ISN'T FREE

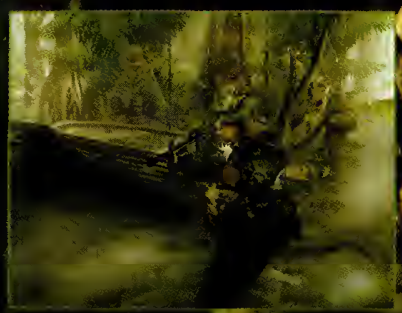
WORLD

Bad Weather Credited for Sudden Drop in Colombian Cocaine Production

By Gene Colon
GLOBE PRESS NETWORK

as meteorologists around the world continue to examine the data. A

New York – An unusually



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UBISOFT

THEY'RE MONSTERS!

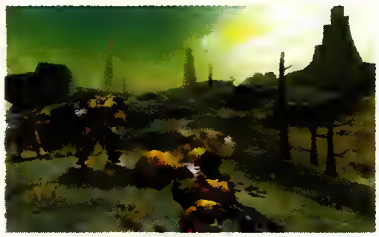
Psst! Come closer, reader—but not too close! For beneath our lovable plush exteriors lie snarling, toothy beasts, ready to pounce. In fact, the only thing scarier than our gruesome selves is the monstrous volume of games—good and bad, big and small—hitting store shelves in the coming year. Fret not! For GMR is here to clear the chaff and skim the cream from the top of 2004's crop. Would you concur, Tarquin, old chap?

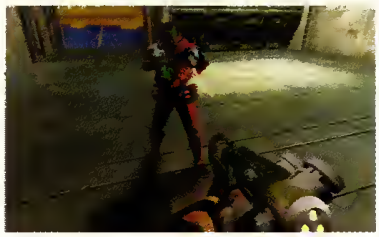
Certainly, my dear Mortimer. Some of this list may look familiar—an even dozen games are appearing for the second time. Eleven from last year's list (including *BG&E*, *KOTOR*, and *Ninja Gaiden*) have since earned top marks, as well as GMR's coveted Essential Selection Award in the process.

THE 50 MOST EXCITING GAMES OF 2004...

Quite right, Sal. In fact, we've also assessed the fortunes of the industry's leading players: how they fared in '03 and what the coming year holds for them. And, do they taste good with a side of children? So have a gander, dear reader, and let us know what *you* think will be the biggest and brightest of '04. Just remember: Keep it clean—we may be monsters, but we still have feelings.

Don't forget, Tarquin, that with our pseudopodia pressed this close to the ground, even we can't avoid the occasional oversight, omission, or flat-out mistake. Some games (*Tomb Raider: AOD*, *P.N.03*) didn't prove worth the pulp we panned them on, and who could have anticipated the maniacal magic that is *Wario Ware, Inc.*? So keep your Sharpies handy, because—like the games themselves—this list is bound to change. Or, as Sebastian likes to say, "Evolve."





49 TRIBES: VENGEANCE

SYSTEM: PC | PUBLISHER: VIVENDI | DEVELOPER: IRRATIONAL GAMES | RELEASE: Q4 2004

- QUICK PITCH: STARSHIP TROOPERS WITHOUT ALL THE DISGUSTING BUGS
- SOUNDS LIKE: ALL HELL BREAKING LOOSE

The original multiplayer-only *Tribes* shooter, *Starsiege: Tribes*, was such a big success for online gaming—helping to drive the concept in much the same way that *Counter-Strike* and *EverQuest* did—that it can be credited with helping to spawn the golden age of online PC gaming. How ironic then that this installment of the series focuses on providing a rich single-player experience.

Tribes: Vengeance, currently in development at Irrational Games (*System Shock 2*, *Freedom Force*), immerses gamers in a sweeping epic of intergalactic intrigue, drama, and gunplay. As is fashionable these days, the story unfolds from multiple viewpoints and spreads its focus across a number of key characters.

But even though a compelling single-player campaign is at the core of the game, the action will remain pure *Tribes*—rocket-pack-fueled mayhem, vehicular combat, and spaced-out energy weapons are the name of the game. Powering it all under the hood is an enhanced version of the *Unreal* engine.

Irrational Games has a track record of making games known as much for their entertaining story lines as their innovative gameplay. But *Tribes* fans should rest assured knowing the multiplayer component will add to the game's online notoriety, thanks in big part to the addition of Michael "KineticPoet" Johnston (the creator of the popular Team Rabbit 2 modification) to work on the multiplayer mode.

So exciting it makes: us wish we hadn't been kicked out of the tribe.

50 TRANSFORMERS

LOOKS LIKE: OUR COLLECTIVE CHILDHOOD DREAMS COME TRUE

SYS: PS2 | DEV: MELBOURNE HOUSE
PUB: ATARI | REL: Q2 2004

QUICK PITCH: RETRO-COOL ROBOTS HIT PS2

PC
PS2

True, there's never been a good *Transformers* videogame. But even after the latest miserable release (Takara's Japan-only *Transformers Tataki*), we actually think Atari's *Transformers Armada: Prelude to Energon* could break the losing streak.

Besides getting the all-important character models and transformation animations just right, Melbourne House's game formula exploits both the 3D driving and run-n-gun abilities of the three selectable Autobots. Optimus Prime, Hot Shot, and Red Alert. Huge maps feature plenty of familiar Decepticons to blast, including Megatron, Starscream, and Cyclonus. Good news, for a change.

So exciting it makes: us feel old.

48 THE MOVIES

$20 MILLION A PICTURE IS NICE. BUT WE'VE ALWAYS WANTED TO CATER

SYSTEM: PC | PUBLISHER: ACTIVISION | DEVELOPER: LIONHEAD | RELEASE: JUNE 2004

- QUICK PITCH: MAKE A STUDIO. MAKE MOVIES. MAKE HAPPY
- SMELLS LIKE: CELLULOID AND SIN

Are you a little Dawson? Do you dream of making it big in Hollywood and directing your very own little blockbusters? And do you dream of doing it in the 1920s? If so, *The Movies* was designed specifically for you.

Another Molyneux special, this game is like *RollerCoaster Tycoon*, except you build movie sets instead of cast-iron deathtraps. The more sets you have, the more types of productions your studio can handle, and this equals more money for everything else—actors, props, crews, and whatnot.

It doesn't stop there, though. You actually get to direct your movies in real time, edit the scenes together, and share the finished products with other would-be directors. It works like this: Let's say you're shooting a love scene. As it plays out, there will be an onscreen slider. Set it all the way to the left, and the actors will look at each other with bedroom eyes, whispering sweet nothings. Slide it all the way right, though, and clothes will be ripped off and nails will scratch backs.

There are some *Sims*-esque aspects involved in dealing with your actors, too. Just like their real-life counterparts, the beautiful people will develop larger-than-life personas, which will result in things such as inflated senses of self-importance (read: high paychecks) and alcohol addiction. It's up to you to decide how they're managed, and ultimately, what kinds of films your cinematic empire produces.

So exciting it makes: us wonder the hell a key grip does.

GMR PREDICTS...

2003 DOWN

ACCLAIM

- WHAT HAVE THEY DONE? *BMX XXX*, *Legends of Wrestling*, *Freestyle Street Soccer*, *Vexx*
- LAST YEAR: Acclaim continued to mishandle its *All-Star Baseball* franchise, and *Vexx* fell flat. On the bright side, Dave Mirra dropped that pesky $20 million lawsuit.
- THIS YEAR: Some big projects are rumored to be on the way, but right now, *Legends of Wrestling*, *Showdown* and *Alias* are some of the only games Acclaim has announced—not much to build a company on

2004 DOWN

47 SPY FICTION

LOOKS LIKE: METAL GEAR SOLID WE MEAN THAT IN THE NICEST WAY POSSIBLE HOWEVER WE PROMISE

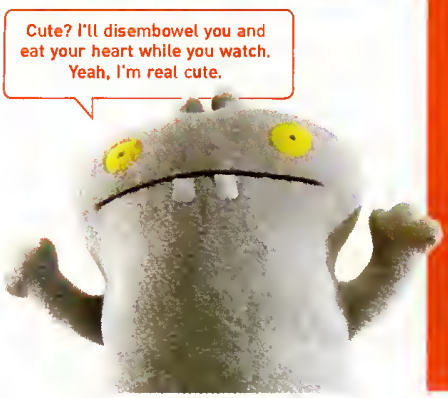
SYS: PS2 | DEV: ACCESS GAMES
PUB: SAMMY | REL: SEPTEMBER 2004

QUICK PITCH: SOLID SNAKE MEETS JAMES BOND

It's put-up-or-shut-up time for both *Spy Fiction*'s creators—among them artist Range Murata and several veterans of Sony's *Extermination*—and its many critics. The game took a wave of flak for its striking resemblance to the *Metal Gear Solid* series, but the developers can flip the script with a solid effort when it arrives here this fall.

To Access' credit, *Spy Fiction* looks more and more like its own game as it approaches the final stages of development. Murata's sharp character designs have benefited from tuned-up 3D modeling, and new shots of the interface present a clearer, simpler tactical picture to the player. Mixed in with all of those practical features are plenty of fun gimmicks, including a descent through laser trip wires and superbly rendered optical camo.

So exciting it makes: us spy on our neighbors.



46 RESIDENT EVIL 4

SYSTEM: GC | PUBLISHER: CAPCOM | DEVELOPER: CAPCOM | RELEASE: Q3 2004

QUICK PITCH: THE QUEEN MUM OF SURVIVAL-HORROR GAMES
LOOKS LIKE: NEW LIFE FOR THE VENERABLE SERIES

As much as we enjoy turning around slowly and pressing Up to walk forward (we don't), and as much as we appreciate fighting off hordes of the undead and loving it (actually, it's getting a little stale), we're still excited for the fourth *Resident Evil* for some reason. Maybe we're suckers for being scared, or maybe it's the beautiful (and true) 3D engine.

But with recent scare fare such as *Silent Hill 3* and *Fatal Frame* getting deep into what truly frightens the bejeezus out of us on a psychological level, can *RE4* still rely on the shocky and schlocky B-grade horror of its predecessors? Director Shinji Mikami loftily claims that *Resident Evil 4* will be so scary, we'll "pee [our] pants." Bring it on, the *GMR* Depends Challenge™ is ready and waiting.

So exciting it makes: us want to fix a big ol' Jill sandwich.

45 RALLISPORT CHALLENGE 2

THE DIRTIEST RACING GAME EVER! (BY DEFAULT, MIND YOU)

SYSTEM: XBOX | PUBLISHER: MICROSOFT | DEVELOPER: DIGITAL ILLUSIONS | RELEASE: Q1 2004

QUICK PITCH: THE BEST RACER FOR XBOX JUST GOT BETTER AND MORE CROWDED
LOOK OUT: FOR THAT TREE

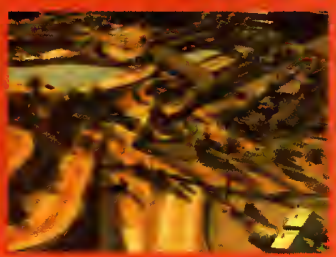
Xbox's first—and best—rally racer is back, and this time, it's online and ready to kick some grass, mud, snow....

The thing about rally racing is that it's not only about going from point A to B and memorizing a bunch of turns, but also about fully understanding and appreciating the road, which can be both your friend and foe. Because the difference in victory or defeat just might be that little patch of snow you never saw coming. But you'll see it, and like everything else, it'll look damn good.

Everything about *RalliSport Challenge*—the superb controls, incredibly slick-looking cars, and even the jaw-dropping environments—is back and better than ever. You'll be hard-pressed to find a more complete package. The small things (like the difference in handling for each car), all the way up to the big things (the tracks are indeed very big things), are all done very well. And don't forget to include licensed cars and plenty of unlockables.

Best of all, because *RalliSport* wears its arcadey gameplay like a badge of honor, each turn will avoid giving you an anxiety-inducing headache. Plus, you'll have plenty of company this time around.

So exciting it makes: us happy about driving in the rain.



XB
PS2
GC

GMR PREDICTS...

2003 HOLD

ACTIVISION

- WHAT HAVE THEY DONE? *THUG, Tenchu, Wrath of Heaven, Return to Castle Wolfenstein: TOW*
- LAST YEAR: *Wolfenstein: Tides of War* lit up Xbox Live while *THUG* ripped it up with the most innovative online community for PS2. Some unfortunate delays (cough—*DOOM 3*—ahem) hurt the PC side of things.
- THIS YEAR: *DOOM 3* is a guaranteed smash for PC, *Vampire: Bloodlines* shows promise, and a *Spider-Man* sequel's success is assured. The once-powerful Q2 lineup may be running low on steam, though.

2004 HOLD

44 THE NIGHTMARE BEFORE CHRISTMAS

SYSTEM: PS2 | PUBLISHER: CAPCOM | DEVELOPER: CAPCOM | RELEASE: OCTOBER 31, 2004

- QUICK PITCH: CAPCOM AND TIM BURTON MAKE MADNESS TOGETHER
- LOOKS LIKE: JACK SKELLINGTON'S CAMEO APPEARANCE IN KINGDOM HEARTS WENT OVER BETTER THAN ANYONE EXPECTED

Tim Burton's movies are the definition of cult hits, so it's not too surprising to see one picked for a videogame revival, even 10 years after its theatrical debut. And *The Nightmare Before Christmas* is a perfect choice—the stop-motion classic has been a favorite for years, thanks to its unique animation and macabre style.

The test will be to see if those unique visual qualities can successfully translate to real-time PS2 3D. Capcom's creators from Production Studio 3—led by *Breath of Fire V* and *Clock Tower 3* producer Tatsuya Minami—have an opportunity to one-up Square Enix if they can outdo the flashy Halloweentown levels in last year's *Kingdom Hearts*.

They'll have some experienced help with the project as well. Deane Taylor, art director of the original film and a contributor to many other animation productions, is on the project. Its graphics use unusually detailed textures to mimic the look of the film's characters. Start counting down to Halloween 2004 for the game's simultaneous worldwide release, since this one just can't wait until Christmas.

So exciting it makes: us walk around in stop motion. In scary costumes.

43 FAR CRY

FEEL THE GENTLE ISLAND RHYTHMS...OH WAIT, THAT'S MACHINEGUN FIRE

SYSTEM: PC | PUBLISHER: UBISOFT | DEVELOPER: CRYTEK STUDIOS | RELEASE: Q1 2004

- QUICK PITCH: GUNS ROSES, AND TROPICAL ISLANDS COMBINE TO SPELL TROUBLE IN PARADISE
- LOOKS LIKE: AN AMAZING TECH DEMO. PLAYS LIKE AN ARMCHAIR COMMANDO'S WET DREAM

When it comes to vacation getaways, most folks think of the simple pleasures: hot beaches, cold beers, palming coconuts...but not so for the pasty geniuses over at German-based Crytek Studios have who'd rather kill than chill in their latest FPS, *Far Cry*.

Far Cry is set in the expansive outdoor jungles of Cabatu, a fictitious tropical island inexplicably populated by hot-blooded mercenaries. Although we expect the game's scenario to air on the side of a ridiculous Hollywood action flick, recent hands-on time with *Far Cry* on the PC prove that it's more than just a pre-scripted run through staid backdrops and wince-inducing dialogue. More of a combat simulator (think tropical *Halo*) than a traditional key-hunt adventure, *Far Cry* is shaping up to a real savior of the genre—on and off Xbox Live.

So exciting it makes: the wait for *Halo 2* that much easier. Or does it?

42 EVER-QUEST II

SOUNDS LIKE: INEVITABILITY

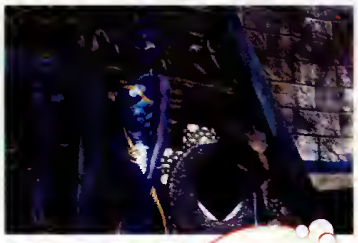
SYS: PC | DEV: SONY ONLINE ENT. | PUB: SONY ONLINE ENT. | REL: Q1 2004

QUICK PITCH: EVERQUEST FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

What's a company to do once it has created the most popular massively multiplayer online RPG in the world? Well, other than piling on a ridiculous number of expansions, the answer is simple: make a sequel! *EQ2* is sure to wreak even more unmentionable havoc upon your already nonexistent sleeping schedule.

Like its forbearer, *EQ2* embraces group-oriented, players-versus-the-world gameplay in a medieval fantasy world populated by all manner of dwarves, elves, ogres, trolls, and weird rat people. The sequel features snazzy upgrades, such as team-exclusive attacks and spells, lunar and environmental cycles that affect gameplay, and character aging—might your character eventually lose his or her teeth? We don't know, but either way, it's high time the addictive *EQ* got a worthy successor.

So exciting it makes: us forget all 12 steps.



PC

PS2

GMR PREDICTS...

2003 → 2004

ATARI

- WHAT HAVE THEY DONE? *Enter the Matrix, Unreal Tournament 2003*
- LAST YEAR: *Enter the Matrix* duked it out with the latest *Tomb Raider* for the title of 2003's most embarrassing release. The, ahem, "winner" was *ETM*.
- THIS YEAR: A new, improved *Unreal Tournament* and the long-awaited *Driver 3* should lead the way for a broadening lineup from the French publishing giant.

GMR PREDICTS...

2003 → 2004

CAPCOM

- WHAT HAVE THEY DONE? *Mega Man X7, Breath of Fire V, Dino Crisis 3*
- LAST YEAR: *Breath of Fire V* was one of the most innovative RPGs in years—pity no one noticed. *Mega Man X7* and *Dino Crisis*? Not so much with the innovative.
- THIS YEAR: Whoever can afford *Steel Battalion* will have a blast. *Onimusha 3, Monster Hunter, Resident Evil: Outbreak*, and *RE4* are all guaranteed killer apps.

41 THE SIMS 2

JUST WHEN YOU WERE RETURNING TO YOUR REAL LIFE

SYSTEM PC | PUBLISHER ELECTRONIC ARTS | DEVELOPER MAXIS | RELEASE Q1 2003

QUICK PITCH BETTER THAN THE ORIGINAL AND NOW WITH DIGITAL-DEATH-INDUCED DEPRESSION!
SOUNDS LIKE A NEW ROUND OF EXPANSION PACKS IS ON THE WAY

The Sims have been taking over the world, one bored housewife at a time. A scad of expansions and console versions have made this game about running a household into a household name.

Now comes *The Sims 2*, the full-fledged follow-up to the original PC title, and it has everything you'd expect from a sequel: new graphics, new features, and new content. But it also adds something very intriguing that should change the whole scope of the game. Your Sims no longer live on in eternal limbo, but instead actually live, age, and die—and pass their DNA to the next generation of Sims they spawn. Your Sims will also be smarter, and their behavior will be reflected visually. If they sit around all day, they'll get fat; if they work out, they'll be trim. All told, *The Sims 2* will let you lead a far more realistic fake life.

Your Sims no longer live on in eternal limbo, but instead actually live, age, and die.

So exciting it makes: us want to start living.

40 SID MEIER'S PIRATES!

SYSTEM PC | PUBLISHER ATARI | DEVELOPER FIRAXIS GAMES | RELEASE 2004

QUICH PITCH BREAH OUT THE OJ RNO GRRB YOUR HOOH HRND--IT S TIME FER SOME SERFRRING STRRTEGY!
SOUNDS LIKE A BUNCH OF GROG-SWILLING BUCCANEERS

Sid Meier's classic high-seas strategy game, *Pirates!*, is getting a fresh coat of paint (complete with a slick 3D makeover) later this year with a brand-spanking-new edition. Become a career pirate as you loot, sack, burn, and pillage plenty of seaside towns and would-be competitors or defend the seas in the service of your noble king.

Aside from these role-playing elements, *Pirates!* will give players free range to explore the vast sea, allowing for plenty of open-ended gameplay pursuits. There won't be any off-the-shelf multiplayer support, although it hasn't been ruled out as a possibility. Whatever the case, *Pirates!* is sure to stand out in the recent crowd of pirate-themed titles. Now, let's just hope no one decides to inundate us with *Haunted Mansion* knockoffs....

So exciting it makes: us intentionally gouge one of our eyes out.

39 THE INCREDIBLES

LOOKS LIKE PIXAR STUDIO S LICENSE TO PRINT MONEY JUST GOT RENEWED

SYS GC/PS2/XBOX | DEV HEAVY IRON STUDIOS
PUB THQ | REL Q4 2004

QUICH PITCH OVERWEIGHT SUPERHERO CRN'T TIE HIS BELT NEWS RT 11

A videogame about swimming around, looking for a certain lost fish, doesn't scream action. Thankfully, Pixar's next movie, *The Incredibles*, has a generous infusion of meaty, macho heroics—just the thing for a superpowered game.

As of yet, very little information has been released on the movie. However, Brad Bird, the director of *The Iron Giant*, is at the helm, which can mean only very good things for the story. What we do know is that a family of superheroes is trying to keep their secret identities on the DL while carrying on a normal suburban life. Samuel L. Jackson and Jason Lee are among the voice talent for the movie, although whether they're providing the in-game voices is still being finalized.

The game's visuals seek to match the slick, stylized look of the animation, which is best described as a colorful cartoon throwback to the golden-age comic books. With a range of gameplay from third-person action to vehicles, plus the requisite range of superpowers, THQ is decisively reaching out to an older crowd this time around.

So exciting it makes: us jump out of windows, trying to eke out some latent superpowers.

XB
PC
PS2
GC

GMR PREDICTS...

2003 UPI

EA

- **WHAT HAVE THEY DONE?** *Madden NFL, NBA Live, Need for Speed Underground, SSX 3, The Sims*
- **LAST YEAR** EA continued to do what it does best: mop up the sports-sim market and deliver solid games for other genres. *SSX 3* took the series in a new direction, and *Underground* redefined arcade racing.
- **THIS YEAR** EA's breadth and depth continues to go unchallenged. The *EA Sports* line will sell millions of games as usual, and *The Sims 2* will sell all those millions and more.

2004 UPI

"Your breath...it's *fantastic*."

MONSTER GAMES WE'D LOVE...

...IF WE KNEW ANYTHING ABOUT THEM

The problem with doing a Top 50 list at the beginning of the year is that we're not psychic. If we were, we'd be picking lottery numbers out of the air, and learning early on whether that hot chick down the hall has the hots for us. We'd also bore right into the brains of game developers everywhere to find out what they're secretly working on. But in lieu of any experimental psychic lobotomys, we've assembled here the Top 5 games we know little of, except for the fact that they exist.

05 Grand Theft Oughta

If you're one of the three people who's managed to avoid buying a *Grand Theft Auto* game over the past couple of years, you'll likely be given another chance to turn a blind eye to the most successful franchise in the universe sometime in 2004, as Rockstar Games rolls the *GTAIII/Vice City* engine out for one last hurrah. Scuttlebutt says it won't be *GTA4* (they're most likely saving that for the PS3), but another "side story" along the lines of *Vice City*.

04 Celda Zelda Redux

Whether you were a fan of the cel-shaded aesthetics of *The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker* or not, there's no denying that the game itself rocks. Well, according to birds flying around Miyamoto HQ, the next GameCube *Zelda* game will mark the return of the very same cel-shaded visuals, which we here at *GMR* have zero problem with. Link and co. have *always* been on the cartoony side, but those of you holding out for a moodier grittier, more mature Link will probably have to wait until Nintendo's next console.

03 What Time It Is

Originally, Team Ninja's *Dead or Alive: Code Cronus* project was supposed to be what eventually turned into *DOA Online*, which it isn't. Then it was suggested that *Code Cronus* was in actuality *DOA4*. Team Ninja boss Tomonobu Itagaki said "Nope." So what exactly is *Code Cronus*? According to Itagaki "We are making *Dead Or Alive: Code Cronus* to show the world how much Team Ninja loves the Xbox. It's too early to tell you more. Please wait." Okay.

02 Cloud 9

As if *Star Ocean 3*, *Front Mission 4*, *Drakengard*, *Kingdom Hearts: Chain of Memories*, and *Final Fantasy VII Advent Children* weren't enough for 2004, Square Enix has something else up its sleeve that will supposedly blow us away. Two possibilities come to mind: *Chrono Break* (the sequel to *Chrono Trigger* and *Chrono Cross*), or—we hope you're strapped in—a 3D action-adventure featuring *FFVII*'s spiky-haired blonde soldier, Cloud Strife.

01 Mercy Mercy Me, the Ico-logy

The original *Ico* trapped us in its gossamer web of gentle storytelling, simple play mechanics, organic puzzle-solving and sun-drenched graphics. The fear we felt whenever a smoky monster erupted from the ground was tangible in the way only a frightened boy armed with a stick could convey. We're certain that with the PS2 entering the autumn of its years that Fumito Ueda (formerly of Warp—*Enemy Zero*) and co. will be ready to reveal the sequel, *Nico*, this year.

XB

PS2

GMR PREDICTS...

2003 DOWN

EIDOS INTERACTIVE

EIDOS

- **WHAT HAVE THEY DONE?** *Tomb Raider: ADD, Backyard Wrestling, LOK: Defiance, Whiplash, Deus Ex 2*
- **LAST YEAR** Lara Croft's spectacular collapse on both small and big screens eclipsed some strong games. *Whiplash*, *Deus Ex: Invisible War*, and the latest *Kain*, which showed that Crystal Dynamics still has it.
- **THIS YEAR** While we wonder what's become of Core Design, Eidos soldiers on with its remaining reliable assets. Crystal Dynamics has more solid games in the works, and Ion Storm isn't going anywhere, yet.

2004 HOLD

38 NFL STREET

SYSTEM: GC/PS2/XBOX | PUBLISHER: ELECTRONIC ARTS | DEVELOPER: EA TIBURON | RELEASE: AVAILABLE NOW

QUICH PITCH: QUICH PITCH QUICH RUN, QUICH PASS
LOOKS LIKE: BRETT FAURE IS TAKING OVER LINEBACHER DUTIES FOR THE PACHERS

Ever since Midway sucked some fun out of *NFL Blitz* by making it more realistic, football fans have wanted a no-rules, knock-your-teeth-out pigskin classic for those times when *Madden* seems too tame. Thanks, EA Sports, for catering to our base desires.

Even though it shares little in common with its EA Big labelmate *NBA Street*, *NFL Street* offers the same kind of irreverent action that has more to do with trash talking and trick plays than complex blitz packages and QB pass ratings.

Games are 7-on-7 and feature the same players on offense and defense. So your QB might also play safety, and your linebacker might play running back. You'll pick your team playground style: one real-life NFL player (including a few legends like Barry Sanders) at a time. Don't bother looking for kickers or punters—there isn't any of that wussy junk in this game. Once you score a touchdown, running in the point after gets you one, and passing gets you two.

One thing *NFL Street* does share with its NBA cousin is the GameBreaker power meter, which is filled up by showboating and making big plays and turnovers.

So exciting it makes: easy Sunday mornings a little more violent.

37 STEEL BATTALION: LINE OF CONTACT

WATCH YOUR SIX

SYSTEM: XBOX | PUBLISHER: CAPCOM | DEVELOPER: CAPCOM | RELEASE: MARCH 2004

QUICH PITCH: GLORIOUS EHCESS FOR GEEHS
SOUNDS LIHE: BUILDINGS BEING CRUSHED UNDERFOOT

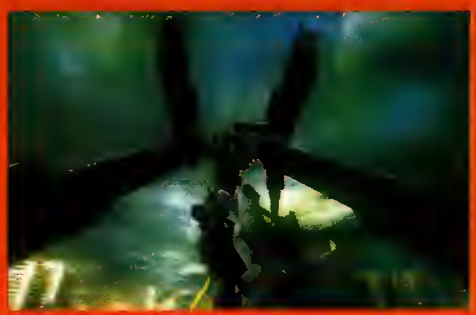
With its predecessor arguably the most realistic simulation game of all time (surprising, considering the completely fictional subject matter), *Steel Battalion: Line of Contact* is set to fulfill the series' potential with heavy-metal 5-on-5 squads duking it out in hot online skirmishes.

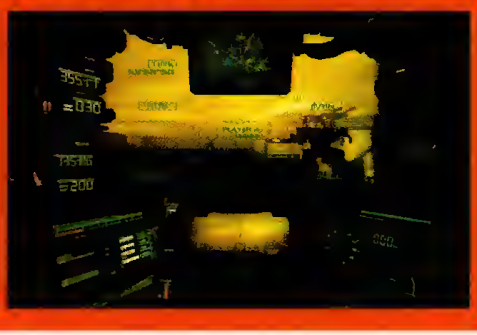
That gleefully cheesy term "the power of the Xbox" will be put to good use here as VT pilots jump into the cockpit of their highly customizable mechs while firing up their cumbersome 40-button controllers.

But what if you missed out on purchasing the original *Steel Battalion* the first time around? Capcom plans to rerelease the original game, along with the specialized controller, for the original price of $199.99. *Steel Battalion: Line of Contact* will then be sold separately with the usual $49.99 tag. While the total cost to play this game comes out to around $250 (not including Xbox Live charges), at least this way all gamers can experience the original game as well. Plus, no additional fees beyond an XBL subscription will be required.

In case you're wondering, *Line of Contact* will also contain an offline experience for those not quite ready to dip their feet in the public arena.

So exciting it makes: us run out to the blood bank for a quick $200.





36 GRADIUS V

LOOKS LIKE: THE GOOD OL NINTENDO THUMB S COMING OUT OF RETIREMENT

SYS: PS2 | DEV: TREASURE
PUB: KONAMI | REL: Q1 2004

QUICK PITCH: IT S YOU VERSUS THE ENTIRE UNIVERSE AGAIN

What do you get when you combine one of the most recognized and beloved franchises in the history of shooters with the current young hotshots of the genre? A match made in heaven known as *Gradius V*.

Treasure is set to do it all over again, this time taking the tried-and-true *Gradius* universe and infusing it with its special kind of magic, in the process making fanboys weep. If you considered previous pulse-pounding, thumb-breaking editions of *Gradius* to be child's play, fear not because Treasure is here to make you into a man!

It's all here: wave after wave of death and destruction, ships of every size at every front, Easter Island heads, and mind-bending innovations the genre has yet to see—which happens to be Treasure's specialty.

So exciting it makes: blister cream a necessity.

XB
PS2
GC

GMR PREDICTS...

2003 HOLD
2004 HOLD

EMPIRE INTERACTIVE

- WHAT HAVE THEY DONE? *Ford Racing 2, Ghost Master, Big Mutha Truckers*
- LAST YEAR: For whatever reason, Empire's *Starsky & Hutch* revival failed to set contemporary gamers' hearts on fire.
- THIS YEAR: It's honestly hard to see where Empire plans to go this year. It could pull itself out of the budget-gaming funk, but does it really want to?

GMR PREDICTS...

2003 HOLD
2004 UP

KOEI

- WHAT HAVE THEY DONE? *Dynasty Warriors 4, Warship Gunner, G1 Jockey*
- LAST YEAR: *Dynasty Warriors* kept moving monster units, while *Warship Gunner* and the latest *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* epic quietly came and went.
- THIS YEAR: Koei expects *Samurai Warriors* to go platinum all over the world, and it may very well be right. But the company can't rely on Omega Force forever.

35 CUSTOM ROBO

IF YOU BUILD THEM, THEY WILL FIGHT

SYSTEM: GC | PUBLISHER: NINTENDO | DEVELOPER: NOISE/MARIGUL | RELEASE: Q3 2004

QUICK PITCH: BUILD ROBOT. ENGAGE IN BATTLE. REPEAT.
LOOKS LIKE: ANOTHER GEM FROM JAPAN FINALLY MAKES IT TO OUR SHORES

Consider it the greatest Nintendo 64 game you never got the chance to play—that is, until now. Rejoice, giant-fighting-robot fans, for *Custom Robo* is finally coming to America!

But what exactly have they been playing in Japan for so long now? The aptly named *Custom Robo* is an action title that tightly integrates elements from *Pokémon* and *Virtual On* into a quick and easy-to-play package.

The core of the game is building your mech to be the very best on the battlefield. You'll have a ton of arms, legs, heads, and guns to choose from (more than 200 total) and even more chances to face off against rivals in various competitions.

After all of that, your customized robot of destruction and mayhem can fight amongst friends in numerous multiplayer modes.

So exciting it makes: us glad to give our Transformers a break from all the fightin'.

33 RE: OUTBREAK

SYS: PS2 | DEV: CAPCOM
PUB: CAPCOM | REL: MARCH 2004

QUICK PITCH: EXPERIENCE RACCOON CITY ONLINE
SOUNDS LIKE: SHUFFLE SHUFFLE •MNNNGGUHHH•

Having played a nearly complete version of *Resident Evil: Outbreak*—Capcom's four-player online action game—we're happy to report that, much to our surprise, the game has turned out to be absolutely fantastic.

What makes *Outbreak* so cool, besides the great graphics and innovative cooperative play, is the single-player offline mode, in which you can choose from eight different characters to play as, each with their own unique course through the game. While playing offline, you can unlock over 200 collectible items (like secret costumes) and then equip and show them off online. Awesome.

So exciting it makes: us pee a lot.

34 BREAKDOWN

SYSTEM: XBOX | PUBLISHER: NAMCO | DEVELOPER: NAMCO | RELEASE: MARCH 2004

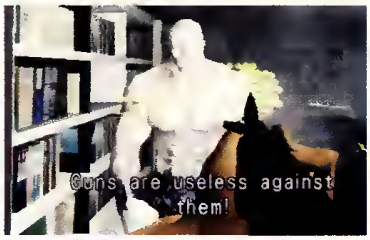
QUICK PITCH: FIRST-PERSON FISTS OF FURY
TASTES LIKE: A KNUCKLE SANDWICH

When your arm radiates a bright yellow and looks like it's on the verge of splitting open, you've got problems on your hands. Derrick Cole is in just such a predicament. How he got in this situation, he doesn't remember. But getting out of it is the objective of *Breakdown*, Namco's new first-person brawler.

Breakdown exercises some arms control and brings out los manos for a revision of the first-person shooter genre. That "you are there" sensation is re-created by gathering several gameplay styles together—there's fighting, puzzles, weapons, and even hamburger munching. Cole can punch with both hands, use various combos, and even do *Matrix*-style somersaults. And he'll need every one of those moves at arm's reach when he goes up against the T'Lan warriors—ghastly behemoths that have ripples of energy snaking down their spine and cold, empty stares. These modern-day albino ogres are impervious to gunshots and burning fire, but Cole's funky, supercharged fist curiously has the power to take them down. Huh.

The sci-fi story might at first seem to resort to that familiar plot device of forgotten memories, but narratively, the amnesia angle is smartly utilized to steadily reveal the mystery to the player. In hazy dreamlike hallucinations, Cole must wade his way through the miasma of his mind to get some answers. Our answer is that *Breakdown* will be one to watch for.

So exciting it makes: us breakdown. In tears, man, in tears.



GMR PREDICTS...

2003 UPI

KONAMI

KONAMI

- WHAT HAVE THEY DONE? *ZOE: The 2nd Runner*, *Castlevania: LOI*, *Winning Eleven 6 International*
- LAST YEAR: Konami got a lot of mileage from its lesser names in 2003. *Castlevania* and *Zone of the Enders: The 2nd Runner* lived up to their promise, and *Winning Eleven* made a smashing Stateside debut.
- THIS YEAR: It's another Year of the Snake—*Twin Snakes* on GameCube and *Snake Eater* on PS2. *Winning Eleven* makes yet another charge at *FIFA*, and the voice-operated *Lifeline* could be a sleeper hit.

2004 UPI

XB
PS2
GC

32 BATTLE FOR MIDDLE-EARTH

SYSTEM: PC | PUBLISHER: ELECTRONIC ARTS | DEVELOPER: EALA | RELEASE: SPRING 2004

QUICK PITCH: IT'S LIKE WARCRAFT, BUT WITH ORCS
SOUNDS LIKE: A YEAR'S WORTH OF SLEEPLESS NIGHTS

Lord of the Rings is about magic and adventure and little dudes with hairy feet, right? Well, it's also about big-ass battles with thousands of screaming orcs and 100-foot-tall oliphants, and _LOTR: Battle for Middle-earth_ is an epic real-time strategy game that's all about that kind of mass-scale horn locking.

Built off the *Command & Conquer: Generals* engine and developed by the same team that created that bestseller, *Battle for Middle-earth* plops gamers into the middle of some of the most notable battles from Peter Jackson's cinematic interpretation of the Tolkien classic.

Playable from both the good and evil sides, *Battle for Middle-earth* gives gamers a wealth of different armies and units to command.

Of course, any RTS worth its mined salt has a multiplayer mode, and *Battle for Middle-earth* is going for innovation with a system of smaller interconnected battles.

Since EA owns the rights to make games based on the movies (Vivendi has the book rights), *Battle for Middle-earth* is chock-full of voiceovers and clips directly from the movie. *Battle for Middle-earth* looks like a must have for RTS and *Lord of the Rings* fans alike.

So exciting it makes: fantasy lit cool.

31 TRUE FANTASY LIVE ONLINE

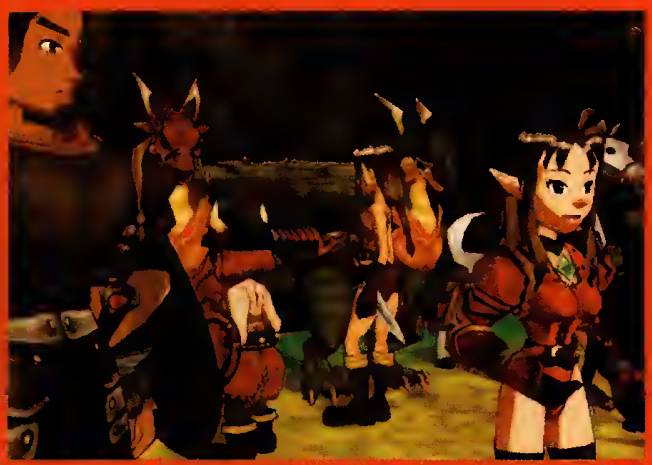
WATCH YOUR WEIGHT VIRTUALLY, AND MORE!

SYSTEM: XBOX | PUBLISHER: MICROSOFT | DEVELOPER: LEVEL 5 | RELEASE: SPRING 2004

QUICK PITCH: AMBITIOUS MMORPG FROM THE MAKERS OF DARK CLOUD
LOOKS LIKE: A CHARMING COMPETITOR TO THE STRAIGHT-FACED [illegible] OF FINAL FANTASY XI

As you read this, Level 5 is crunching to bring this game to beta. It can't be under that much pressure, though—it's not like _True Fantasy Live Online_ is Microsoft's last, best, and only hope to sell Xboxes in Japan. Well, wait, does it have any other games over there? Besides _Bistro Cupid_?

If you're taking bets, though, we'll gladly back this horse. *Dark Cloud 2* proved that Level 5 has industry-leading design talents, and *True Fantasy Live Online* is packed with innovative ideas, including a character-development system that evolves your avatar's appearance according to the life you choose to lead online. Combine that with a massive persistent world (including four distinct realms), and this could be the most powerful addiction developed for Xbox Live.



It's not like True Fantasy is Microsoft's last, best, and only hope to sell Xboxes in Japan.

So exciting it makes: fantasy a reality.

30 WORLD OF WARCRAFT

SMELLS LIKE: YOU IN YOUR ROOM FOR THREE DAYS STRAIGHT, SANS BATHING

SYS: PC | DEV: BLIZZARD
PUB: BLIZZARD | REL: JUNE 2004

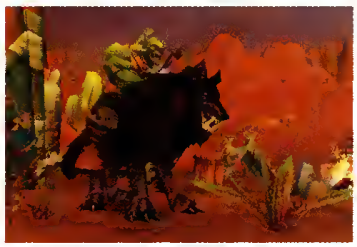
QUICK PITCH: DIABLO + EVERQUEST + THE END OF YOUR STANDING LIFE

To Blizzard fans, the only thing more exciting than _StarCraft 2_ is the possibility of _Diablo 3_. _World of WarCraft_ is probably somewhere around No. 3, but given how sick Blizzard's games tend to be, that's far from a bad place to be.

World of WarCraft is what would happen if *Diablo* and *EverQuest* had a baby—it's got a massive, *EQ*-style, content-rich persistent world, but it's also got *Diablo*'s fast-paced, numbers-behind-the-scenes accessibility.

All of this takes place in the *WarCraft* universe, which has a rich history that is as goofy and comic as it is ham-fisted and epic. So, if you love the idea of persistent worlds but hate what MMORPGs have historically entailed, then prepare to be *WOW*ed.

So exciting it makes: *EverQuest* look like a junior-high-school diorama.



XB
PC

GMR PREDICTS...

2003 HURT
2004 HURT

LUCASARTS

- WHAT HAVE THEY DONE? *KOTOR, RS3 Rebel Strike, Gladius, RTX Red Rock*
- LAST YEAR: It was easy to forget *RTX Red Rock, Rebel Strike*, and the ignominious *Full Throttle 2* cancellation in the face of the awesome *KOTOR*
- THIS YEAR: LucasArts is getting better at handling the *Star Wars* license—the upcoming *Republic Commando* and *Battlefront* point toward good things

GMR PREDICTS...

2003 DOWN
2004 HOLD

MAJESCO

- WHAT HAVE THEY DONE? *Blowout, Drake*, and *Maximum Chase*
- LAST YEAR: Majesco didn't have much to trumpet this year between the disappointing *Blowout* and the disappearing *BlackSilver* (which may be cancelled)
- THIS YEAR: More *BloodRayne*'s coming, which may or may not prove to be good news. *Advent Rising* looks like a much more encouraging prospect

29 PHANTOM DUST

SOUNDS LIKE: MECHASSAULT IS OVERDUE FOR SOME COMPETITION IN THE LIGHTLY POPULATED XBOX LIVE MASS-DESTRUCTION DEPARTMENT

SYS: XBOX DEV: MICROSOFT GAME STUDIOS
PUB: MICROSOFT REL: FALL 2004

QUICK PITCH: A COLLECTIBLE CARD GAME CROSSED WITH A KICK-ASS FOUR-PLAYER PSYCHIC BRAWLER

Director Yukio Futatsugi explains *Phantom Dust* as a bridge between gamers from two distinctly different camps. A *Halo* champion, he says, doesn't have any common ground with a *Magic: The Gathering* champion, since their games demand different skills. So *Phantom Dust* rewards both of those skills, blending the action of online shooters with the strategy of a card game.

Even early versions show a surprising amount of depth—players are tasked with building a deck of 30 psychic powers from a library of 300. Those are dealt into the arenas at random, so while there's a substantial degree of strategy to deck building, sheer chance keeps things interesting.

And if all of this sounds too nitpicky, the Xbox Live action is more than fast enough, and the totally destructible postapocalyptic environments are gorgeous.

So exciting it makes: us forget all about trying to bend spoons just by looking at them.

28 REPUBLIC COMMANDO

SYSTEM: XBOX PUBLISHER: LUCASARTS DEVELOPER: LUCASARTS RELEASE: Q2 2004

QUICK PITCH: JEDI KNIGHT FROM A STORMTROOPER'S PERSPECTIVE
SOUNDS (AND LOOKS) LIKE: JANGO FETT IN A CLONE-TROOPER COSTUME

Writer/director Kevin Smith might explain *Star Wars: Republic Commando* like this: "Everyone thinks stormtroopers are bad guys, but earlier in their history, they weren't really bad, they were just clone troopers working for a government that turned sour. So when this game starts, they're good yet disposable cloned soldiers who get tossed into situations with inevitable body counts. In LucasArts' forthcoming FPS, the player gets to don the white duds and become all that they can be."

Republic Commando is the *Unreal*-powered first-person shooter for every guy who ever wanted to be a stormtrooper. But players probably won't be on Death Star guard duty: The game starts during the Clone Wars when troopers and Jedi fought together against common enemies. The battles may be far more intense than prior *Star Wars* outings—huge insect swarms are an early example.

Despite a decidedly mixed action track record, we're expecting much more from LucasArts than, say, a clone of *Star Wars: Bounty Hunter*. Ironic, but exciting.

So exciting it makes: Gerry wish he wasn't too short to be a stormtrooper

27 FINAL FANTASY: CRYSTAL CHRONICLES
THE SPIRIT OF MANA

SYSTEM: GC PUBLISHER: NINTENDO DEVELOPER: GAME DEVELOPER STUDIOS RELEASE: FEBRUARY 2004

QUICK PITCH: FANTASIES FINALLY FULFILLED FOR FOUR
SOUNDS LIKE: THE CHOCOBO NEEDS FOOD. BADLY

If you've expressed joy at the thought of *Final Fantasy* finally returning to a Nintendo console but anguish at the thought that it's not a proper *Final Fantasy*, then take heart that it's at least a proper *Secret of Mana* game.

That game, famous on SNES for its cooperative multiplayer gameplay, is reborn in the four-player *Crystal Chronicles*, which plays a lot like *Gauntlet* on steroids. But fear not, as this is no simple hack-n-slasher. Character customization and inventory management are crucial, and should you be fortunate enough to have three friends with GBAs, each person can help the cause by keeping tabs on functions crucial to effectively navigating each lavish environment. Four character classes and a vast array of armament types round out the package.

So exciting it makes: buying three extra GBA SPs seem like a sound financial decision.

GMR PREDICTS...

2003 UP!

MICROSOFT

- WHAT HAVE THEY DONE? *Crimson Skies: High Road to Revenge, Top Spin, Links 2004*
- LAST YEAR: Xbox Live is still the best service for console gaming online, and Microsoft fed its followers some top-notch titles. *Crimson Skies* and *Top Spin* made the *Halo 2* delay hurt a little less.
- THIS YEAR: *Halo 2*. Any other games worth mentioning? Well, yes—there's a burgeoning sports lineup, BioWare's killer RPG *Jade Empire*, the innovative online action of *Phantom Dust*, and, of course, *Psychonauts*.

2004 UP!

26 FABLE

BECAUSE SOME OF US STILL NEED TO LEARN RIGHT FROM WRONG

SYSTEM: XBOX | PUBLISHER: MICROSOFT | DEVELOPER: BIG BLUE BOX | RELEASE: MAY 2004

QUICH PITCH: ANY ATTEMPT AT A QUICK PITCH WOULD LAST AT LEAST 13 HOURS
SOUNDS LIKE: YOUR LIFE, ONLY MUCH MORE EXCITING

When something like *Fable* comes around, you would do well to pay it some mind. Conceived by Peter Molyneux, the game's concept is unbelievably vast.

As a boy whose village was pillaged, you assume the job of finding those responsible and then either 1) redeeming them, or 2) using them to quench your blood-drenched desire for revenge. Depending on your actions, your character will develop into either a hero or a villain, with blond hair and a cleft chin if you go the hero route, or a hooked nose and face tattoos if you go villain. Your actions will also impact the world around you: If you're a nice guy, the natives will remember your exploits. Heck, some will even start families with you—you can watch your kids grow up throughout your virtual life. All of this sounds kind of insane, but it will probably also be true.

So exciting it makes: morality seem fun.

25 KILLZONE

SYSTEM: PS2 | PUBLISHER: SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT EUROPE | DEVELOPER: GUERRILLA GAMES | RELEASE: SUMMER 2004 (U.K.)

QUICH PITCH: PLAYSTATION 2'S OWN WORLD-BEATING FIRST-PERSON SHOOTER
LOOKS LIKE: ER, HALO NOT EXACTLY LIKE HALO—IT'S A LITTLE LIKE ICO TOO—BUT IT'S HALO THAT FIRST SPRINGS TO MIND

The industry's standards are set pretty high for this one. It's hard to imagine a developer wanting its game to be dubbed a *Halo* killer months before it's even announced. But if *Killzone* can survive being one of the most hyped games in history, it has a chance to become something pretty impressive.

A squad-based first-person shooter is nothing new these days, but *Killzone* promises to deliver the swinging-gun goods with unusual flair. Its bombed-out future battlefields use fog and diffuse lighting to create an indistinct, enveloping atmosphere, which is an interesting design choice. Another unusual design decision—you have a four-man squad, but you control only one member per single-player campaign, guaranteeing four distinctly different gameplay experiences.

So exciting it makes: the thought of getting in the zone appealing, for once.

24 EVIL GENIUS

SOUNDS LIKE: MUAHAHAHAHAHAHAH. (COUGH). HA HA HA!

SYS: PC | DEV: ELIXIR STUDIOS
PUB: VIVENDI UNIVERSAL | REL: Q3 2004

QUICH PITCH: MALEVOLENT MINIONS MANIPULATED

Being notoriously evil isn't all about finer things, diamond rings, foxy underlings, and bling bling. As with any multinational corporation, operating an evil conglomerate brings logistical problems and budgetary issues up the yin yang. But through it all, when you're an evil genius, it's oh so good to be oh so bad.

In the vein of that special brand of '60s-style evil (à la *Austin Powers*), *Evil Genius* offers gamers the comedy-rich opportunity to control a clandestine villainous group. From your remote island HQ (hidden, naturally), you must build up your base and train your minions well.

Occasionally, some do-gooder government agents will attempt to foil your plots, but you'll have the chance to engage in real-time combat and exert some pressure on your R&D division to build all sorts of sinister devices. Just make sure that those crafty secret agents are completely dead before deciding to reveal your grand scheme.

So evil it makes: us check the fine print on our 401(k) and health plans really carefully.

XB
PC
PS2

GMR PREDICTS...

2003 DOWN
2004 UP!

MIDWAY

- WHAT HAVE THEY DONE? *RoadKill, NBA Ballers, SpyHunter 2, NFL Blitz Pro*
- LAST YEAR: *SpyHunter 2* was a bad sequel, and the less said of *RoadKill*, the better. Midway's roots yielded a fun retro package in *Midway Arcade Treasures*.
- THIS YEAR: *Psi-Ops: The Mindgate Conspiracy* is a lot more promising than its title indicates, and the design duo of Tom Hall and John Romero is intriguing.

GMR PREDICTS...

2003 UP!
2004 UP!

NAMCO

- WHAT HAVE THEY DONE? *R: Racing Evolution, kill switch, Xenosaga*
- LAST YEAR: *R: Racing Evolution* blew a flat down the stretch, but *kill switch* was a surprisingly solid 3D shooter. *Xenosaga* hooked fans with its cinematic style.
- THIS YEAR: *Baten Kaitos* and *Tales of Symphonia* should give Namco complete control of the GameCube RPG market, for whatever that's worth.

23 XENOSAGA EPISODE II

BEYOND GOOD, EVIL, AND BIG GOOGLY EYES

SYSTEM: PS2 | PUBLISHER: NAMCO | DEVELOPER: MONOLITH SOFT | RELEASE: TBA

QUICK PITCH: MONSTER MYSTIC HOT-CHICKS-IN-GIANT-ROBOTS SCIENCE-FICTION EPIC
LOOKS LIKE: ITS UBER-GEEK CREATORS OVERDOSED ON BLADE RUNNER, FIVE-STAR STORIES AND MOLDY PSILOCYBIN MUSHROOMS

To put it politely, the makers of *Xenosaga* must be interesting people. To put it less politely, they must be slug-nutty maniacs. Sane people don't make games like this. Sane people make platformers and shooters and nice, safe fantasy RPGs—they don't make six-part giant-robot forays into the philosophical-religious origins of mankind with side-trip episodes of lingerie-clad, Gatling-gun cyborg destruction. If Tetsuya Takahashi manages to finish whatever magnum opus is trapped in his fevered imagination, we're not sure whether he should be lauded or locked up.

In the meantime, *Xenosaga Episode II*—subtitled *Jenseits von Gut und Bose*, or *Beyond Good and Evil*, after another book by philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche—looks ready to settle some controversies but inspire others. The new character designs should come as a relief to players who hated the exaggerated style of the original. Kunihiko Tanaka has crafted more realistic versions of the cast that are much more appropriate for the series' hard sci-fi background.

The heroine of the original *Xenosaga* takes a backseat to the youthful gunslinger Junior in the sequel. However, that's one of the only story details that Monolith Soft is willing to let slip. Beyond that, there's merely a string of striking images from the Tokyo Game Show trailer—spiky new mecha designs, at least one new character, and the promised duel between Margulis and Jin Uzuki, now set in a rain-soaked street nicked from *The Matrix: Revolutions*. More information—such as a release date—will have to wait until later this year.

So exciting it makes: us stroke our long, wizened beards and say "hmmmmm."

22 DARKWATCH

SOUNDS LIKE: THE CREEPY CREAKING OF COFFIN LIDS OPENING OR MAYBE JUST SOME TUMBLEWEEDS

SYS: PS2/XBOX | DEV: SAMMY
PUB: SAMMY | REL: Q4 2004

QUICK PITCH: COWBOYS, VAMPIRES AND NUMEROUS COMBINATIONS OF BOTH

Set in a twisted, dark, and blood-spattered version of the Old West, *Darkwatch* promises full-on shotgun-up-the-nose first-person shooter action, vampire superpowers, and teeth. Lots of teeth.

Hero Jericho Cross enjoys shooting the undead, controlling his bloodlust, and taking long walks in the park with his horse. Having unleashed an ancient evil, Jericho must work with an ancient Templar-like order to keep vampires and their slick hairdos off the streets.

The development team, with members who hail from movie, comic book, and game backgrounds, are true believers in character development and rich storytelling, which bodes well for a game in a genre that's simply not very well known for its depth.

So exciting it makes: our trigger fingers itchier.

21 METROID: ZERO MISSION

SYSTEM: GBA | PUBLISHER: NINTENDO | DEVELOPER: NINTENDO | RELEASE: FEBRUARY 2004

QUICK PITCH: MORE METROID-Y GOODNESS FOR THE 3D-PHOBES
LOOKS LIKE: MORE SLEEPLESS NIGHTS IN FRONT OF THE SP

One of the more pleasant surprises at E3 last year was the mostly unexpected announcement of *Metroid: Zero Mission*, a rapidly deployed follow-up to 2002's superb *Metroid Fusion*. At first, it looked as if *Zero Mission* was merely a remake of the original 1986 *Metroid* (it's only "loosely based"), as it displayed many familiar environments and enemies. But it turns out that *Zero Mission* contains an entirely new adventure for the bounty huntress Samus Aran that's set shortly after the defeat of Mother Brain. Samus retains many of the maneuvers and munitions from *Super Metroid* and *Fusion*.

The best part? *Zero Mission* comes out in early February, which means that your 2004 portable gaming library gets off to a great start.

So exciting it makes: riding on public transportation an attractive option.

GMR PREDICTS...

2003 UP

Nintendo

NINTENDO

- WHAT HAVE THEY DONE? *Mario Kart: DD, Kirby Air Ride, Mario & Luigi: SS, The Legend of Zelda: TWW*
- LAST YEAR: The latest *Zelda* braved constant mockery of its looks to hang in there as a Game of the Year contender. The GameCube's holiday lineup wasn't so solid, but killer titles for GBA picked up the slack.
- THIS YEAR: E3 2004 will be a massive turning point for Nintendo—we'll see the GameCube's last big year of titles, as well as the debut of a certain innovative new creation. Until then, the future's hazy.

2004 HOLD

namco
www.namco.com
the evolution of
SPEED
It's survival of the fastest. R: Racing Evolution thrusts you into the intense competition and heated rivalries of high-velocity professional racing. Adapt, or enjoy the exhaust.
SHOEI
DODGE
Experience the handling of realistic, high performance physics.
Master GT, Rally, Drag and the premier racing circuits.
Fine-tune real world licensed vehicles.
From the developers of Ridge Racer.™
DODGE
Official Licensed Product
GRAB LIFE BY THE HORNS
PlayStation 2
TEEN
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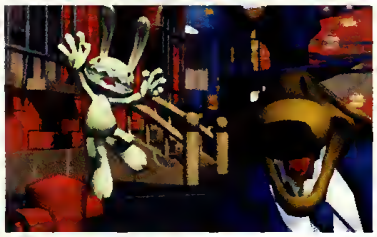
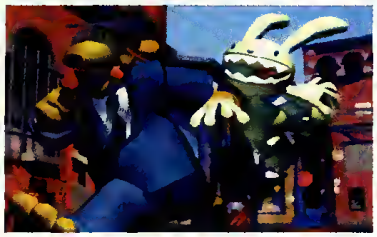
Mild Language
Suggestive Themes
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
NINTENDO GAMECUBE
XBOX
R:RACING EVOLUTION
www.racing-evolution.com





20 SAM & MAX: FREELANCE POLICE

SYSTEM PC | PUBLISHER LUCASARTS | DEVELOPER LUCASARTS | RELEASE Q2 2003

QUICK PITCH FURRY FREELANCERS MAKE WITH THE FUNNINESS
SOUNDS LIKE IT'S TIME FOR GMR'S RABIES SHOTS

Classic gaming franchises never die, they just get resurrected when you least expect it. *Sam & Max: Freelance Police* is the sequel to 1993's *Sam & Max Hit the Road*, a wacky adventure starring a dog in a rumpled suit and fedora and a cute but psychotic rabbit. *Sam & Max* was part of the original LucasArts adventure-game series that included such classics as *Day of the Tentacle* and *Grim Fandango*, all of which hold a special place in the hearts of many old-school PC gamers.

There aren't a lot of details about what kind of weirdness our intrepid freelance cops (they're not private detectives, they're freelance cops, got it?) will be up to this time around, but LucasArts promises "a wild world of screwy and vaguely quixotic missions." Like any good adventure game, it will be rife with puzzles that will surely have the inimitable twist LucasArts adventure games are known for.

The game should look a lot different, too. Gone is the first game's flat (albeit richly illustrated) 2D world, replaced by a very clean-looking 3D engine. The detail is so nice, you can practically smell Max's breath.

LucasArts took a stab at reviving another one of its cartoonish adventure games from the same era when it announced *Full Throttle II* earlier this year. Sadly, that game got canned because it just wasn't up to the company's high standards. Let's hope the same fate doesn't befall *Sam & Max*.

So exciting it makes: us nab a flea collar.

19 ULTIMA X

SOUNDS LIKE A FOOT BEING MERCILESSLY WRENCHED FROM ITS EARLY GRAVE

SYS PC | DEV ORIGIN
PUB ELECTRONIC ARTS | REL Q1 2004

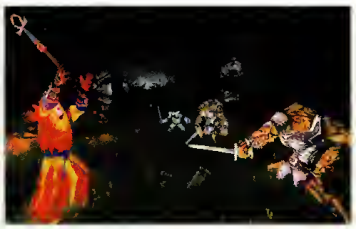
QUICK PITCH MORE MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER GOODNESS IN THE VENERABLE ULTIMA UNIVERSE

XB
PC

The heavy-handed neutering of *Ultima Online*, the cancellation of *UO2*, and the comedy of errors known as *Ultima IX* haven't blessed the franchise with too many uplifting prospects.

Ultima X: Odyssey aims to change that. *Odyssey* is powered by the most recent *Unreal* engine and sports an elegant user interface, in addition to the obligatory excess of monster-bashing, dungeon-crawling, experience-gaining fun. Story-based quests are the rule here, and unique adventuring environments will provide groups with sanctuary from problem players. Yeah, like *UO* ever had those!

So exciting it makes: us forget *Ultima IX*. Almost.



18 PSYCHONAUTS

WHAT ARE YOU, NUTS?

SYSTEM XBOX | PUBLISHER MICROSOFT | DEVELOPER DOUBLEFINE | RELEASE Q4 2004

THE PITCH: THE VOICES IN MY HEAD ARE TELLING ME TO JUMP
LOOKS LIKE: JAMMING AN LSD-LACED PAINTBRUSH INTO YOUR BRAIN

Three-dimensional platformers are a dime a dozen nowadays. And, regardless of their respective quality, it's time for something fresh, and we fully expect the fine lads and ladies of Doublefine to come to the rescue. Their first Xbox effort, *Psychonauts* is going to be totally mental—and we mean that in a good way. Psychic cadet Raz uses powers of telekinesis and levitation, as well as other nifty mind tricks to do battle against (and inside of) the most twisted of minds.

But you should mentally prepare yourself, because it'll be a long wait: *Psychonauts* is currently slated for a Q4 release. Bide your time by reading the unfiltered thoughts of Doublefine boss and nice guy Tim Schafer at www.doublefine.com. It's like playing the game, without the graphics, story, sound, or any kind of interaction.

So exciting it makes: brain surgery look as easy as it is fun!

Doublefine's Psychonauts is going to be totally mental-and we mean that in a good way.

GMR PREDICTS...

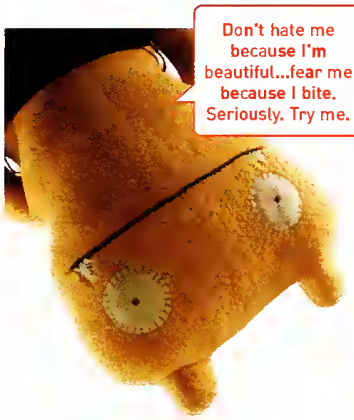
2003 HOLD

SEGA®

SEGA

- WHAT HAVE THEY DONE? *Billy Hatcher and the Giant Egg, Otogi, Virtua Fighter 4: Evolution*
- LAST YEAR: Strong arcade business in Japan made up for weak performances from *Billy Hatcher* and other games. Revival projects bit the dust, too—*Altered Beast* and *Vectorman* met the scrap heap
- THIS YEAR: *Sonic Heroes* will kick off what might be Sega's first entirely upbeat year in, well, years. Sonic's return is solid, and the well-made *Nightshade* and *Phantasy Star Online Episode III* are on the way

2004 HOLD



17 NINA

SOUNDS LIKE: HIGH HEELS CONNECTING WITH SKULLS

SYS: PS2 | DEV: NAMCO
PUB: NAMCO | REL: Q4 2004

QUICK PITCH: TEKKEN FORCE MEETS METAL GEAR SOLID AND 007. WELL, SORT OF.

We still love beat-em-up games. So does Namco. After tossing the fun but forgettable Tekken Force mode into its most recent *Tekken* titles, Namco's getting more ambitious with a deeper-than-average brawler starring founding *Tekken* hottie Nina.

See, Nina's an assassin whose skanky...ahem, provocative clothes mask extensive expertise with hand-to-hand combat, guns, and other weapons, all of which players can master. The setting is initially a combatant-filled cruise ship, but expect numerous other locales. And cameos are quite possible. Didn't some *Tekken* guys run a crime syndicate?

Fans of Namco's CG art can rejoice because that department's been working overtime on *Nina*, which looks like a return to form. In a very eye-catching package, no less.

So exciting it makes: Capcom's *Final Fight* seem like *Burning Fight*.

16 MGS: THE TWIN SNAKES

RETURN TO SHADOW MOSES

SYSTEM: GC | PUBLISHER: KONAMI | DEVELOPER: SILICON KNIGHTS | RELEASE: Q1 2004

QUICK PITCH: GREAT MINDS GET TOGETHER TO IMPROVE UPON A CLASSIC
DOES NOT LOOK LIKE: YOUR DAD'S METAL GEAR

When we first spied *Metal Gear Solid* on PlayStation, it truly had it all: phenomenal graphics, excellent music, groundbreaking gameplay, a gripping story, and get this...voice acting that was actually good!

So when news hit of a GameCube version, questions were immediately posed: Who's working on it? Will there be any changes?

First off, a dream team was formed between Konami's Hideo Kojima and Nintendo's Shigeru Miyamoto, and the industry-buzz-generating Silicon Knights was added to the mix. Together they're working hard to re-create the classic game, as well as incorporate a slew of new features, such as improved graphics, moves featured in the sequel *Sons of Liberty*, totally new weapons, and entirely new story elements.

And to round it all off, Kojima's friend, the young hotshot Japanese director Ryuhei Kitamura, is in charge of totally redoing all the cinemas. Expect things to get very messy this time around. *Twin Snakes* has a very good chance of giving *MGS3: Snake Eater* a run for his money (whoever he is—we're still not totally sure if that's really Solid Snake or not).

In the year of the snake, everything old is new again.

So exciting it makes: us wonder what Psycho Mantis will say this time around.

15 STAR OCEAN 3

SYSTEM: PS2 | PUBLISHER: SQUARE ENIX | DEVELOPER: TRI-ACE | RELEASE: Q3 2004

QUICK PITCH: A FAR-FUTURE SCI-FI ACTION-RPG FROM THE MAKERS OF VALKYRIE PROFILE
LOOKS LIKE: XENOSAGA'S BIG EYES AND FLASHY STYLE WITH A BATTLE SYSTEM THAT WON'T PUT YOU TO SLEEP

***Star Ocean: Till the End of Time* got a pretty raw deal when it was released in Japan. First, it was delayed from fall into spring, giving the developer time to tune the game's battle system and flesh out its story. Then the Square Enix merger happened, shoving its release date back a month. The consequence? A buggy, rushed release that forced an embarrassing recall.**

If all goes well, the latest *Star Ocean* will get fairer treatment in the U.S. An upgraded director's cut release is due in Japan early in 2004, packing in a host of new features—bonus dungeons, a versus combat mode, even two new characters. Hopefully, that will be what American gamers get to play later in the year.

Even if we don't get the director's cut, the third *Star Ocean* is a sharp RPG package. Its real-time combat system joins the combo-happy action of *Valkyrie Profile* to a free-roaming 3D battlefield, offering complete control over the attacks and movements of a three-character party. The nonstop flashy juggle attacks mark this as much more than your usual turn-based RPG.

So exciting it makes: us hope Square Enix brings out the director's cut. Or else.

PS2

GC

GMR PREDICTS...

2003 HOLD → 2004 UP

SAMMY

Sammy Studios

- **WHAT HAVE THEY DONE?** *Guilty Gear XX, Lethal Skies II, Galerians: ASH*
- **LAST YEAR:** *Guilty Gear XX* wowed fighting fans with its depth and style, while *Lethal Skies II* proved to be a substantial improvement over the original.
- **THIS YEAR:** *Seven Samurai 20XX* looks promising, as does *Spy Fiction*. *Darkwatch* could establish Sammy's San Diego studio as a legitimate contender.

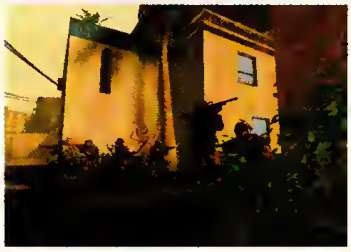
GMR PREDICTS...

2003 HOLD → 2004 UP

SNK

SNK

- **WHAT HAVE THEY DONE?** *King of Fighters 2001/2002*
- **LAST YEAR:** SNK came back from the grave with a *King of Fighters* revival on PS2 and promises more to come, although *Metal Slug 3* hit some snags at SCEA.
- **THIS YEAR:** *King of Fighters 2002* and *Samurai Shodown 5* will hopefully make their way Stateside, and *Metal Slug Advance* can't come out soon enough.



14 FULL SPECTRUM WARRIOR

LOOKS LIKE CNN AMERICA'S ARMY AND COMMAND & CONQUER COMBINED

☐ SYS PC/XBOX ☐ DEV PANDEMIC
☐ PUB THQ ☐ REL Q1 2004

QUICK PITCH BACKSEAT COMMANDOS PICK UP WHERE CNN LEAVES OFF

Get ready for something truly new. Hidden behind these screenshots is *Full Spectrum Warrior*'s novel approach. Think of it as a team-based military command sim—the child of *Sims*-style abstraction and American combat fetishism.

Created with cooperation from the U.S. Army, *FSW* allows players to control teams of modern American soldiers in familiar settings, limited, for better or worse, by the actual rules binding U.S. soldiers. Players don't take control of individual men; rather, they issue commands to squads, emphasizing strategy at the expense of action. But unlike most strategy games, *FSW* is played out through killer 3D close-ups instead of distant overhead maps.

Who'd have expected a military-endorsed strategy game where the puzzles are solved with a little thinking and a lot of gunfire? A big thumbs-up to Pandemic.

So exciting it makes: G.I. Joes seem like...toys.

13 DEAD OR ALIVE ONLINE

AIN'T THAT A KICK IN THE PANTS

■ SYSTEM XBOX ■ PUBLISHER TECMO ■ DEVELOPER TEAM NINJA ■ RELEASE MARCH 2004

■ QUICK PITCH ONE OF THE BEST 3D BRAWLERS GETS THE XBOX LIVE TREATMENT
■ FEELS LIKE A KARATE CHOP TO THE CHOPS

In an effort to bring the entire Xbox community up to speed on the history of *Dead or Alive*, Tecmo will release this *DOA1/DOA2 Hardcore* double-pack this March. While *DOA1* will be a pixel-perfect port of the superlative Saturn version, which was never released in the U.S., *DOA2 Hardcore* will be a completely different beast.

Re-created from the ground up using the *DOA: Xtreme Beach Volleyball* graphics engine, *DOA2* sports vibrant graphical detail that surpasses the visual splendor of *DOA3*. Hyper-detailed textures and some of the most amazing lighting effects you've ever seen grace the hard-hitting action. Improved animations and more responsive control make this the most exciting fighting game of the year. But don't take our word for it. Head online and slap someone 3,000 miles away over Xbox Live.

So exciting it makes: us choose life.

12 CHAMPIONS OF NORRATH

☐ SYSTEM PS2 ☐ PUBLISHER SONY ONLINE ENTERTAINMENT ☐ DEVELOPER SNOWBLIND STUDIOS ☐ RELEASE Q1 2004

☐ QUICK PITCH BALDUR'S GATE GETS THE EVERQUEST TREATMENT
☐ SOUNDS LIKE: CLANG! YEARGH! FWOOMP!

The *EverQuest* universe is expanding faster than a D&D nerd's waistline. In addition to console versions of the popular MMORPG, there has been an RTS (*Lords of EverQuest*) and now a good old *Diablo*-style hack-and-slasher that puts a new face on a familiar body.

Champions of Norrath: Realms of EverQuest is built with the *Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance* engine by the same team that created that game. Gamers familiar with the *EverQuest* universe will be able to play as male or female versions of five different races from that game across 45 levels filled with more familiar monsters and enemies. To add replay value, the dungeons are generated randomly, making for a different experience each time through. The ability to play (and chat) cooperatively with up to three of your buddies over the Internet (sorry, broadband only) and use thousands of unique weapons and items should hook gamers like a jelly doughnut on flypaper.

So exciting it makes: the wait unbearable. Almost.

GMR PREDICTS...

2003 HOLD

SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT

SONY

- WHAT HAVE THEY DONE? *SOCOM II: US Navy SEALs, Downhill Domination, Jak II, Ratchet & Clank: GC*
- LAST YEAR: The *Jak and Daxter*, *Ratchet & Clank*, and *SOCOM* sequels all more than improved upon their predecessors, giving Sony a solid lineup for the holidays. Losing *GT4* must have hurt, though.
- THIS YEAR: *Gran Turismo 4* has a shot at becoming the PS2's biggest seller ever, and it doesn't look like Naughty Dog and Insomniac plan to rest on their laurels. Now if only they'd sort out that online strategy.

2004 UP!

11 ONIMUSHA 3

SYSTEM: PS2 | PUBLISHER: CAPCOM | DEVELOPER: CAPCOM | RELEASE: MARCH 2004

- QUICK PITCH: FINAL SHOWDOWN BETWEEN BADASS ACTION HEROES AND LEGIONS OF MEDIEVAL DEMONS
- LOOKS LIKE: THE VIDEOGAME EQUIVALENT OF THE BIGGEST SUMMER BLOCKBUSTER-BIG BUDGET, BIG STARS, BIG FLASH

After mopping the floor with the competition at last year's Tokyo Game Show, the final chapter in Capcom's samurai saga is ready to strike. *Onimusha 3* is looking sharper and sharper as it approaches, despite its abandonment of those ever-so-pretty prerendered backgrounds, and it plays pretty slick too, whether you're the sword-wielding Samanosuke or Jean Reno's imaginatively armed modern-day soldier.

The *Onimusha* series is a sign of things to come in videogame development. The days of small teams and clever ideas creating surprise hits on a shoestring is giving way to the Hollywood approach: Throw huge amounts of money and talent at a huge blockbuster game. You can see all that money and talent on the screen, too—*Onimusha 3* features the highest production values in a game since *Kingdom Hearts*, top-notch graphics, an amazing orchestral soundtrack, and plenty of red-blooded style to suit those players who simply can't take all of that Disney cheer.

So exciting it makes: us go and rent all of Jean Reno's films. Except for *Godzilla*. Yech.

10 JADE EMPIRE

CAN THE CHOPSTICKS BE MIGHTIER THAN THE LIGHTSABER?

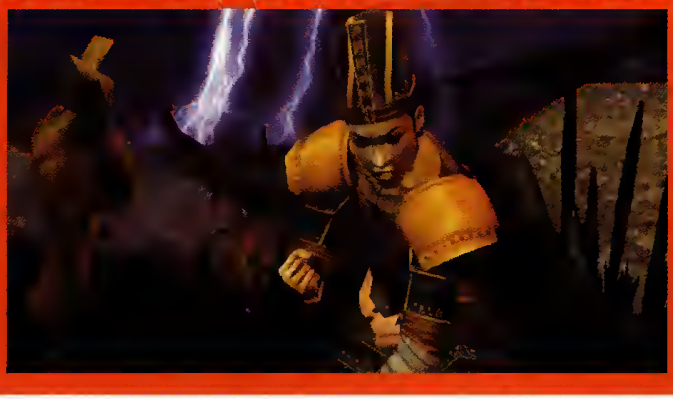
SYSTEM: XBOX | PUBLISHER: MICROSOFT | DEVELOPER: BIOWARE | RELEASE: Q4 2004

- QUICK PITCH: KNIGHTS OF THE OLDER, MORE ACTION-FILLED REPUBLIC
- LOOKS LIKE: CHINESE SILK WRAPPED AROUND A BIG CANADIAN TOTEM POLE

BioWare pulled off the improbable with its 2003 Xbox hit, the *Star Wars*-licensed RPG *Knights of the Old Republic*. Now it's back with something equally unexpected: an action-RPG steeped in Chinese mythology that promises to outdo *KOTOR* in every respect. Except for the robots.

Jade Empire's battles have multiple martial arts fighting styles, magic, and weapons that you can use interchangeably in real time. Some people wanted better-than-*KOTOR* graphics. Xbox exclusivity means Jade's polygon counts have tripled, and the Chinese backdrops recall favorite *Virtua Fighter 4* and *DOA3* scenes. There's also a lot more going on offscreen. Your character roams solo, building an army of followers who complete missions while you hunt the villains who beheaded your dad. We'll be shocked if isn't a big hit.

So exciting it makes: us a little less jaded.



09 METROID PRIME 2

LOOKS LIKE: RETRO'S GOT THEIR SHIP TOGETHER

SYS: GC | DEV: RETRO STUDIOS
PUB: NINTENDO | REL: PROBABLE Q4 2004

QUICK PITCH: SEXY-STRONG SAMUS DOES MORE EXPLORING AND BATTLES THE OCCASIONAL EVIL

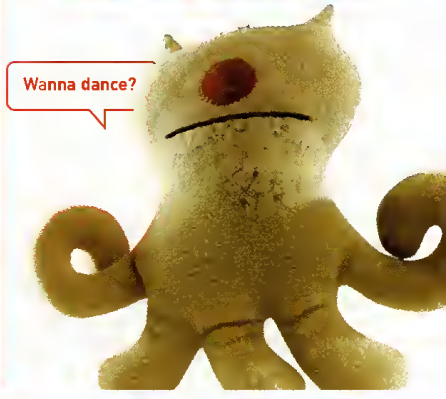
All we know about the follow-up to *Metroid Prime* is based on a painfully brief video clip that we first saw at last year's E3: Bounty hunter Samus Aran is back in her form-fitting orange jumpsuit, and her Chozo godparents appear none-too-pleased about current events. Could it be that a mysterious space virus has infected the normally pacifist race of poultry-people and it's up to Samus to find the cure? Or maybe they're just tired of footing the bill every time Ms. Aran decides to blow up a planet or derelict space station?

We're assuming that *Prime 2* will be everything *Prime* was and more. Nintendo, if you feel inclined to listen to some suggestions, here you go: Bring back the screw attack and ease off of the frequent weapon switching. Keep everything else as is, and we're stoked.

So exciting it makes: us roll up into a ball o' joy

XB

PS2



GMR PREDICTS...

2003 UP!

SQUARE ENIX.

SQUARE ENIX

- WHAT HAVE THEY DONE? *Sword of Mana, Final Fantasy Tactics Advance, Unlimited SaGa, FFX-2, FFXI*
- LAST YEAR: Square's return to GBA delivered no less than expected, while *Final Fantasy* fans predictably ate up the series' first ever true sequel and its polished massively multiplayer online incarnation.
- THIS YEAR: *Final Fantasy XII* is the biggest of what may be four new *FF* titles in 2004, alongside *Crystal Chronicles*, the PS2 version of *XI*, and the DVD movie *Final Fantasy VII: Advent Children*.

2004 UP!

CHANGE JOBS IN THE HEAT OF BATTLE

ENTER AN EXCITING MISSION-BASED STORY WITH NON-LINEAR GAMEPLAY

EXPERIENCE FAST, DYNAMIC COMBAT

PlayStation 2
FINAL FANTASY X-2
LAST TIME SHE SAVED THE WORLD.
THIS TIME IT'S PERSONAL.
YUNA'S STORY CONTINUES IN
THE FIRST TRUE SEQUEL OF
THE FINAL FANTASY® SERIES.
NEW DANGERS THREATEN SPIRA.
FAMILIAR ALLIES ARE AT HAND.
AND SOMEWHERE, SOMEHOW,
A FRIEND MAY STILL BE ALIVE...
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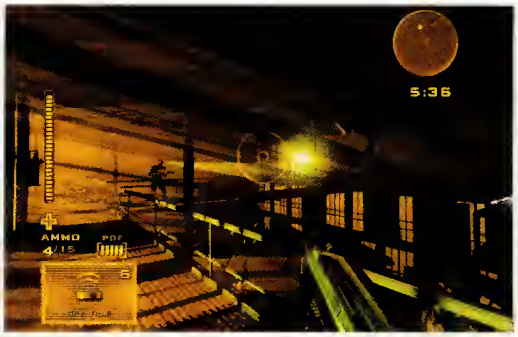
08 SPLINTER CELL: PANDORA TOMORROW

SYSTEM: GC/PS2/XB | PUBLISHER: UBISOFT | DEVELOPER: UBISOFT | RELEASE: Q1 2004

- QUICK PITCH: PLAY IT AGAIN AS SAM
- SOUNDS LIKE: THE SOUND OF SILENCE



Ubisoft's phenomenally successful stealth-action shooter *Splinter Cell* is a tough act to follow. But give a lot of credit to the company for not just making the follow-up a bunch of new missions built on old technology, like so many sequels are. *Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow* brings something new and fresh to a tired genre.

The acrobatic Sam Fisher has a lot more moves this time, and more opportunities to use them. Sam will also be visiting more diverse environments, from jungle guerrilla camps to moving passenger trains in his efforts to squelch international terrorism.

But the most intriguing aspect of *Pandora Tomorrow* is its multiplayer mode, something that developers of stealth-shooters have struggled with since the inception of the inherently solitary genre. *Pandora Tomorrow* tackles this by keeping the arenas small; up to four players are spread across two teams: spies and mercenaries. Spies infiltrate, mercenaries defend. Spies play like Sam Fisher and have his set of skills, weapons, and technologies. Mercenaries have a totally different set, and even play differently—in first person. If it works, expect to see everyone copy it.

So exciting it makes: us soooooo curious about what's in the box...

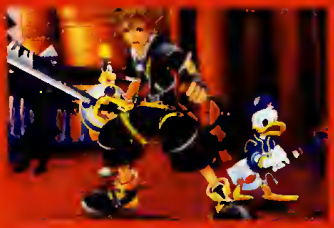
XB
PC
PS2
GBA
GC

07 KINGDOM HEARTS 2/KH: CHAIN OF MEMORIES

KEYBLADES, KEYBLADES EVERYWHERE.

SYSTEM: GBA/PS2 | PUBLISHER: SQUARE-ENIX | DEVELOPER: SQUARE-ENIX | RELEASE: Q1 2003

- QUICK PITCH: ONE DISNEY RPG WAS A HIT, SO TWO MORE SHOULD BE DOUBLE THE FUN
- SOUNDS LIKE: MILLIONS AND MILLIONS AND MILLIONS OF DOLLARS POURING INTO SQUARE ENIX'S BANK ACCOUNTS WHEN THESE GAMES FINALLY HIT THE MARKET



When Square Enix explained that it wanted *Kingdom Hearts* to become a leading franchise, the assumption was to simply expect sequels every other year. Nobody expected two sequels on two platforms, but we're getting them.

Not at the same time, though. *Chain of Memories* on GBA comes first, picking up where the original *Kingdom Hearts* left off. We'll see that in 2004, setting the table for *Kingdom Hearts 2*, which hits PlayStation 2...well, one of these days. What we've seen of *Chain* paints an interesting picture of what gameplay is in store. It's a top-down 2D action-RPG with a card-driven magic system—you draw spells, summons, and cooperative attacks from a hand of magical cards. This simplifies the menu system, while retaining much of the original game's depth.

We haven't seen any gameplay from *Kingdom Hearts 2*, but the snatches of story in Square's first trailer dangle plenty of hooks. The heroes are older and the villains more menacing. Those lurking hooded figures are up to something sinister, and there are more of them working in concert. The good guys have an equalizer, though—Mickey Mouse looks a lot sharper in black leather than you might think.

So exciting it makes: us want to check out this whole "Disney" thing we keep hearing about.

GMR PREDICTS...

2003 HOLD

TAKE-TWO/ROCKSTAR

- **WHAT HAVE THEY DONE?** *Manhunt, Grand Theft Auto Double Pack, Midnight Club 2*
- **LAST YEAR:** *Manhunt* failed to generate any real excitement, but the *GTA Double Pack* more than made up for it. *Midnight Club 2* ensured Rockstar had more than just *Grand Theft Auto* to live on.
- **THIS YEAR:** We should see another *Grand Theft Auto* by the end of this year, which guarantees 2004 will end on a high note for Take-Two. Its Gathering PC division should keep quietly producing solid games

2004 HOLD

06 STARCRAFT GHOST

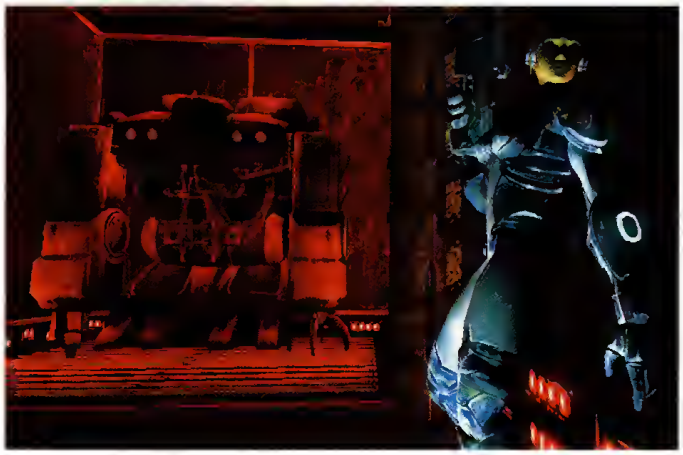
SYSTEM: GC/PS2/XB | PUBLISHER: VIVENDI UNIVERSAL | DEVELOPER: NIHILISTIC | RELEASE: Q1 2004

- QUICH PITCH: GLOBALLY POPULAR SCI-FI STRATEGY GAME GOES FOR HARDCORE ACTION
- SOUNDS LIKE: VIVENDI'S MARKETING STAFF HAD BETTER NOT DROP THE BALL

Blizzard's strategy game *StarCraft* is a global success story, with more fans in South Korea than South Dakota. So even though the franchise's second title, *StarCraft: Ghost*, represents an entirely different and crowded genre—third-person action-adventure—it already looks so superb it makes players around the world finally appreciate a Western approach to the *Metal Gear Solid* formula.

Though detailed *Halo 2*-like backdrops and aliens taken straight from the *StarCraft* universe will appeal to series fans, *Ghost*'s real draw for mainstream actioners will be its smart use of sci-fi gadgets and weapons to make stealth, shooting, and sniper-style assassinations feel exciting again. Which is great, because the second time around rarely ever seems this compelling.

So exciting it makes: South Korea's government proclaim a national release-date holiday



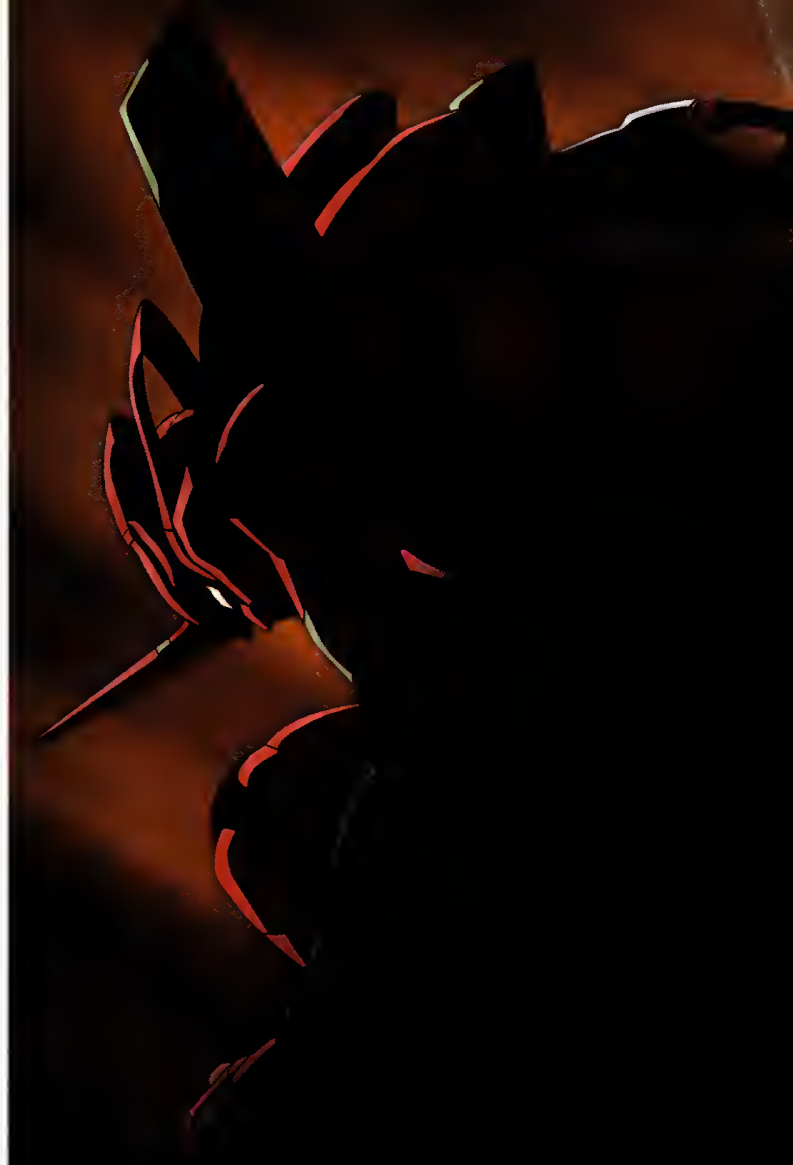
GMR PREDICTS...

2003 ↑ 2004 HOLD

TECMO

TECMO

- **WHAT HAVE THEY DONE?** *Fatal Frame 2, Monster Rancher 4, DOA: XBV*
- **LAST YEAR:** *DOA: XBV* was the most entertaining bad volleyball game yet. Less splashy franchises—including *Monster Rancher*—had rock-solid outings, too.
- **THIS YEAR:** 2003's loss—*Ninja Gaiden* and *DOA Online*—is 2004's gain. The creators of *Monster Rancher* and *Rygar* have new games in the works.



05 DOOM 3

HELLFIRE. DAMNATION. WHAT'S NOT TO LOVE?

SYSTEM: PC, XBOX | PUBLISHER: ACTIVISION | DEVELOPER: ID SOFTWARE | RELEASE: Q2 2004

- QUICK PITCH: DEMON-KILLING SHOOTER WITH CHIPSET-KILLING GRAPHICS
- SOUNDS LIKE: WE'RE GONNA NEED A NEW PAIR OF BOXER SHORTS

Id Software set the standard for fast 3D movement with *Doom* and believable 3D worlds with *Quake*. Now it's ready to redefine 3D shadows, lighting, and gore with *Doom 3*. But by this time next year, gamers will probably be debating whether *Doom 3*'s graphics or its changes in play mechanics were the most important addition to the first-person shooter genre.

With a new shadowing and lighting engine, *Doom 3* isn't so much shoot-em-up, like its predecessors; instead, it's more of a slow-paced adventure with a horrifying story. And its newly interactive multiplayer environments are finally complete—with a number of features that will likely render whole hosts of *Quake* multiplayer clones obsolete.

It's worth noting that even after seeing *Half-Life 2*, Id is confident that *Doom 3* is going to deliver 2004's top visual knockout punch. Sigh...time for a new videocard.

So exciting it makes: a one-way trip to hell sound kind of nice, actually.

XB
PC
PS2

04 GRAN TURISMO 4

SYSTEM: PS2 | PUBLISHER: POLYPHONY DIGITAL | DEVELOPER: SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT | RELEASE: Q1 2004

- QUICH PITCH: SEQUEL TO THE GREATEST RACING GAME EVER APPROACHES THE FINAL LAP
- LOOKS LIKE: THE REAL THING

What exactly can be said of *Gran Turismo* 4 that hasn't already been mentioned? Saying it's the most anticipated racing game of all time is old news. Whenever new information is revealed publicly, it instantly becomes the topic of heated debate, and each new screenshot is dissected and analyzed more than any celebrity scandal.

By now it would appear that expectations have reached ridiculous proportions. After all, *Gran Turismo 3* was PS2's first true must-have title and is still widely regarded as the definitive racing game. Now Sony has to improve upon perfection for the fourth time in a row. It's a seemingly impossible task, and yet somehow we're confident that the team at Polyphony Digital will more than meet the challenge.

Featuring more than 500 licensed cars from various manufacturers all over the world, stunning photo-realistic courses, spot-on controls that only a true racing expert can vouch for, improved physics, A.I. that promises to be more humanlike, all-new modes of play, and the long-awaited addition of online play, *Gran Turismo* 4 is set to redefine yet again what a racing game can and should be.

So exciting it makes: us want to make the daily commute with a DualShock in our hands at all times.

GMR PREDICTS...

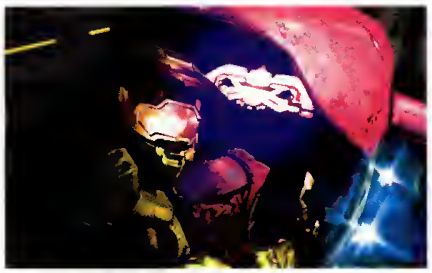
2003 UP!

THQ

THQ

- **WHAT HAVE THEY DONE?** *SpongeBob SquarePants, Warhammer 40k, Smackdown!, Sphinx, Tak*
- **LAST YEAR:** THQ kept doing what it does best: Nickelodeon, pro wrestling, and all things licensed. While none of the above set serious gamers on fire, they're still paying the bills .and then some.
- **THIS YEAR:** All the Magic 8-ball says is "*SpongeBob*." But seriously, THQ should continue to diversify its efforts, taking licenses that debuted last year (*Warhammer 40k*, for instance) and building on their success

2004 UP!



03 HALO 2

SYSTEM: XBOX | PUBLISHER: BUNGIE | DEVELOPER: MICROSOFT | RELEASE: FEBRUARY 2004

- QUICK PITCH: THE BEST XBOX GAME RAMPS UP A NOTCH
- TASTES LIKE: A BUCKET OF SCORCHED PLASMA IN THE MORNING

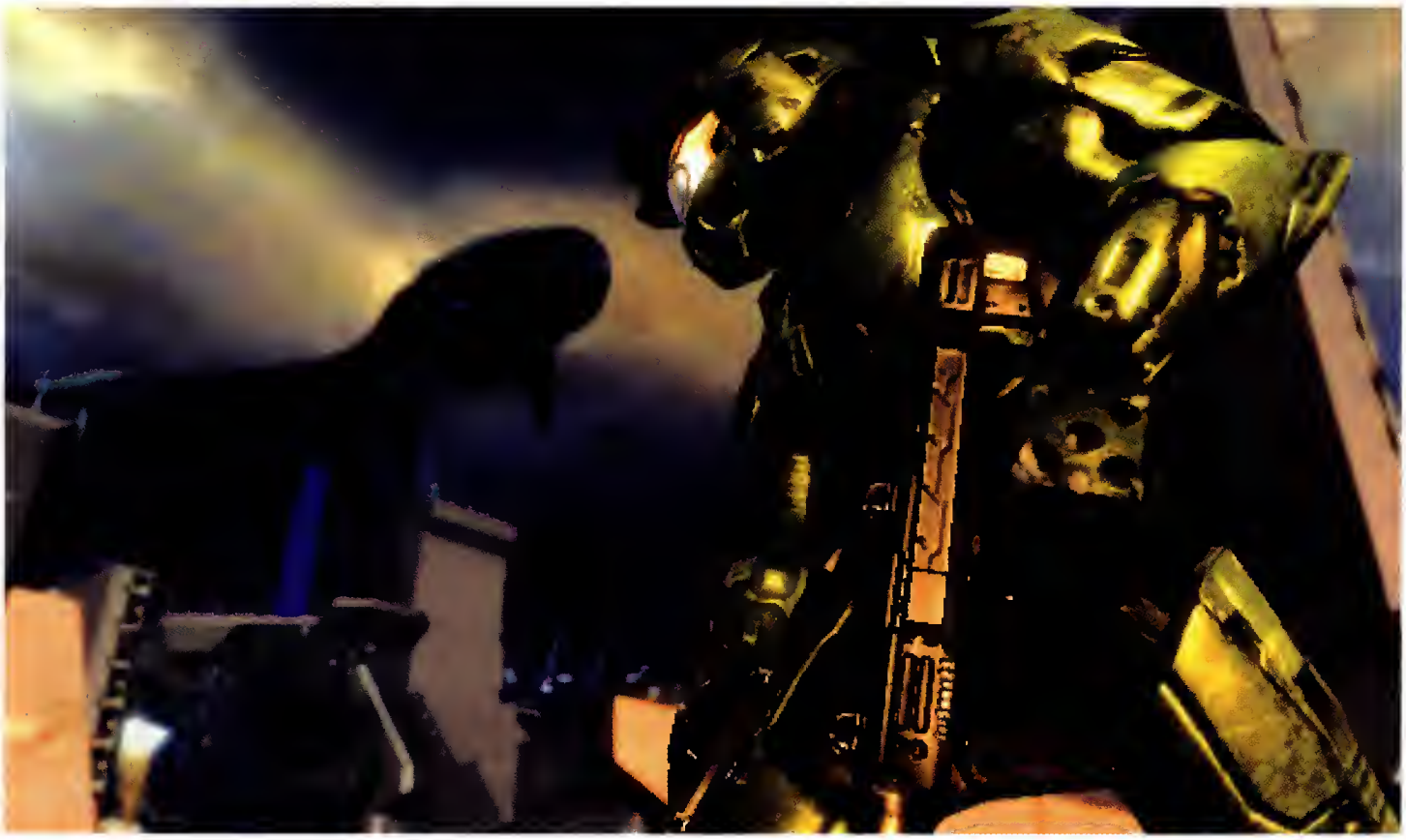
Remember how fun saying "*Halo*'s the only good Xbox game" used to be? Well, that's true no longer, and it's gonna be even less true once *Halo 2* comes out. Its predecessor basically demolished the standards set by previous console first-person shooters, and came pretty close to usurping the supremacy of many of its PC ilk. And like its developers have proudly stated on numerous occasions, *Halo 2* will be all that the original *Halo* was, plus a side of bacon.

While we'd normally call BS on a statement like that, we've no reason to doubt Bungie. Expect *Halo 2* to come strapped with bigger guns (and, as a result, bigger explosions), more variety in enemies, and a host of new tricks at your disposal. You'll be able to do stuff like clobber enemies piloting vehicles and hijack them, cap unruly aliens from behind shadows, and double-fist submachine guns.

The multiplayer mode is kicked into high gear, too—it will be compatible with Xbox Live, so expect an experience well beyond those half-assed tunnel-hacks that you've been using to play online. Bungie promises battles as pitched and insane as the original *Halo*'s most intense single-player levels, but with as many as 16 players on each side.

This time around, players can opt to represent the Covenant forces or humans, which brings some outrageous possibilities into play. One Covenant unit is reportedly able to scale walls, ape-style. Imagine launching rockets while hanging from a cliff and using a cloaking device. If your pants aren't wet after reading this, then you'd better check your pulse.

So exciting it makes: us run out and sign up for the space marine corps—you *did* know they have those, right?



XB

GMR PREDICTS...

2003 UP!

UBISOFT

UBISOFT

- WHAT HAVE THEY DONE? *Prince of Persia. Beyond Good & Evil. Uru: Ages Beyond Myst. Kill*
- LAST YEAR: *Beyond Good & Evil* showed Michel Ancel evolving beyond his *Rayman* roots, and *Prince of Persia* topped dozens of best-of-the-year lists, giving Ubisoft unprecedented credibility with hardcore fans.
- THIS YEAR: Another *Splinter Cell* kicks off a year that should continue the Ubisoft renaissance. Gamers everywhere are looking forward to what the Montreal studio will be bringing out next.

2004 UP!

02 HALF-LIFE 2

KNOWING MAY BE HALF THE BATTLE. BUT IT MAKES THE WAIT SEEM TWICE AS LONG

SYSTE XBOX PUBLISHER VIVENDI UNIVERSAL DEVELO ER VALVE RELEASE Q2 2004

- QUICK PITCH SEQUEL TO SEMINAL STORY-DRIVEN SHOOTER SHIPPING SOON?
- SOUNDS LIKE SOME UNLUCKY HACKER HAD BETTER HAVE A HUGE BANK ACCOUNT

It's one thing to see aliens or demons running through spaceships or foreign planets, and entirely another to see them tearing up your town. Which might explain why *Half-Life 2* instantly vaulted above *Doom 3* when they faced off at E3 2003: *Half-Life 2* had such believable places, people, and physics that it looked less like a game and more like an advance broadcast of an actual alien invasion.

Yet graphics account for only part of *Half-Life 2*'s appeal: As with its predecessor, players expect a compelling story with complex A.I.-fueled interactions. Gordon Freeman returns, joined by Black Mesa security guard Barney, scientist Eli Vance, and an army of controllable bug creatures. Gordon's new partner Alyx, like all of the game's characters, looks great and delivers surprisingly plausible dialogue.

We already know that the characters team up to repel alien threats, including coordinating attacks on building-high spider crab aliens, but it's still unclear whether these events will be entirely dynamic or largely linear. If each of the game's 12 chapters can be completed with wide problem-solving freedom, *Half-Life 2*'s replayability will be astonishing, though it's more likely that the game will simply cast you in an exciting—but linear—movie.

And movies may be as close as we'll come to *Half-Life 2* for some months—and if whispers can be believed, perhaps until 2005. Thanks to the alleged intervention of a hacker and the Internet release of some of the game's source code, Valve delayed the game's release from late 2003 until at least the second quarter of 2004.

So exciting it makes: even us wish hacking was just a little harder.

GMR PREDICTS...

2003 HOLD

VIVENDI UNIVERSAL games

VIVENDI UNIVERSAL

- WHAT HAVE THEY DONE? *Metal Arms: Glitch in the System, Counter-Strike: Condition Zero*
- LAST YEAR: Vivendi survived disaster after disaster surrounding *Half-Life 2* with relative aplomb. In particular, *Metal Arms* came out of nowhere to earn acclaim as a surprisingly fun, offbeat shooter.
- THIS YEAR: *Half-Life 2* is going to dominate the sales charts someday. When it happens, it will be a very good day for Vivendi, which now sits somewhat adrift after Vivendi's sale of its entertainment assets.

2004 UP

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1 METAL GEAR SOLID 3: SNAKE EATER

SNAKES ALIVE!

☐ SYSTEM PS2 ☐ PUBLISHER KONAMI ☐ DEVELOPER KCEJ ☐ RELEASE Q3 2004

☐ QUICK PITCH SUPER-SLICK SEQUEL TO SEMINAL SONS OF LIBERTY SEES SURLY SPY SOLID SNAKE SNACKING ON SERPENTS
☐ SNAKE TASTES LIKE CHICKEN (OR SO WE'VE BEEN TOLD)

PS2

Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater's 2003 E3 debut made everyone in attendance stand (or sit, if you could find some floor space at Konami's perpetually packed booth) up and pay attention. Subsequent sneak peeks at the game have been equally exemplary of director Hideo Kojima's fanatical approach to fulfilling his very specific—if occasionally unclear—vision of the videogame craft.

Conspiracy theorists went rabid when *Snake Eater* was revealed to unfold during the 1960s, an era of escalating tensions and rife with espionage of a lower-tech sort. It's against this precarious political and global backdrop that the player (let's just call him Snake for now, shall we?) crawls out of the air ducts and into the jungle. If 2001's *Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty* was futuristic, then *Snake Eater* is positively prehistoric.

Kojima's mostly unmatched mastery of cinematic cameras and obsessive attention to detail suggests that this thicket will be every bit as finely honed as it is open ended. In a time when seemingly every big franchise is overcompensating for the success of the wide-open style of Rockstar's *GTA* series, a trailer for *Snake Eater* poked fun at—amongst other things—the series' staggering influence.

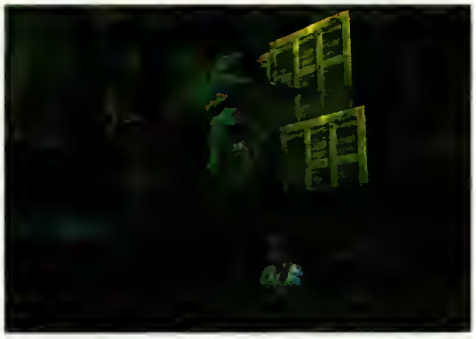
This is no small matter—few other directors, publishers, or games have the credentials to back that bit of lighthearted ribbing up. In any case, assuming the final product's environments remain challenging yet navigable—and not frustrating—*Snake Eater* will sport some stellar 3D level design.

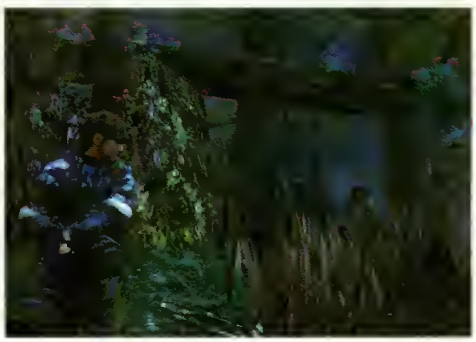
Proving that you can, indeed, teach an old snake new tricks, the player's already ample repertoire has been expanded to complement the departure from the mostly angular environments of *Metal Gear* games past. We've already seen Snake dangling from trees, snacking on subpar sushi, and wading through the water. But other aspects, such as applying camouflage and hunting for dinner, haven't been clarified yet. Kojima and co. have also been sure to emphasize the improved close-quarters combat, which should go quite nicely with the overall emphasis on survival. Treating injuries and tracking and setting traps may sound laborious, but we expect the learning process will be a pleasure.

But while surprisingly substantial information has been released in the past months, we all know better now than to think we've seen more than the tip of the iceberg...or the edge of the jungle. Series' fans are well used to Kojima's fondness for teasing and trickery—after all, no one could have expected *Sons of Liberty*'s Snake/Raiden switcheroo. Despite helming one of the most straight-faced series in games, it's clear that Hideo Kojima likes to have a bit of fun, too. Witness, for example, his willingness to make Snake look the fool by donning an alligator's head as a disguise. In fact, given Kojima's propensity for going "out there", the space-race time setting, and the campy James Bond-style theme song, the possibility of the action going into orbit—as some have suggested—seems no less plausible than, say, a walking, nuclear-equipped tank.

But even if we don't see Snakes in space, expect to see the very first Metal Gear unleashed. And while nothing has been revealed about new additions to the series' trademark cast of character-rich antagonists, we'd be surprised if at least one new boss character doesn't take one of the more gruesome technologies in development at the time, such as chemical or biological weapons, as a motif.

Which is why we're so confident in our enthusiasm for *Snake Eater*. The only thing we really know for sure is that we're going to be blown away when the game is released. While other games on this list will surely hit delays, fail to meet the deafening roar of hype and hoopla, or be made superflous before they hit store shelves—we'd bet our right hand that this one won't. Time tells all, but for now, we can't wait to embrace the snake.





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SYSTEM PS2, XB PUBLISHER SAMMY DEVELOPER SAMMY STUDIOS RELEASE DATE OCTOBER 2004

OLLARS MORE

Sammy Studios is big in Japan but almost unknown here. Darkwatch, produced by ex-Oddworld designers and artists, aims to be the silver bullet that cracks the U.S.

Think of all the games that would be improved by adding vampires. *Mario Sunshine*, for one, and any *Sonic* game, for another. Glueing the odd pair of fangs to that old PC standby *Links Golf* would certainly spice the skins game up a bit, as would a few undead roaming the corridors in *Rainbow Six*. So when Sammy Studios' Chris Ulm and Paul O'Connor sat down to decide which of three possible game designs to green-light, a first-person shooter that would eventually grow fangs fit the bill—but not before going way out west.

"We were playing *Halo* at the time and loved it," Ulm recalls, "and that got us asking, 'What is a genre that really hasn't been done in games, or hasn't been done very well?' And the Western was one that came up."

So, Sammy Studios San Diego's first game, *Darkwatch: Curse of the West*, is full of vampires, but it's also full of cowboys. Don't bother thinking of all the games that would be improved by adding cowboys, because there aren't any. In fact, you can count the number of videogames set in the Old West on one hand. And you can count the number of good games set in the Old West on one finger: *Gunsmoke*. Ulm and O'Connor don't want to make a Western. They want to make something darker. Much darker.

THAT'S MR. CROSS, TO YOU

Jericho Cross doesn't know it yet, but he's about to rob the wrong train. He's tough and grizzled and lean. He might even remind you—just a bit—of The Man with No Name. By the light of the full moon, he jumps onto the locomotive's cars and begins making his way toward the iron safe that must, inevitably, be blown apart. The speeding train is oddly designed, and its insides are littered with bodies—some of them horribly twisted, resembling neither animal nor human. Others are human, but dressed strangely. Out of the dark, screeching figures lurch at him. There's a gun battle. He moves forward, toward the prize. There are more of them. He is fighting for more than gold—he's fighting for his life.

Ulm, *Darkwatch*'s design director, is about 11 feet tall. His head, which sits very still upon his shoulders, is full of monsters. Creepy, disgusting, bloated, howling, grasping monsters that bite you, shoot you, carve you up into little pieces and then eat you. He towers over Visual Director Farzad Varahramyan, whose own head, at least today, is equally bloated with nasty, bloodsucking creatures. Both earned their gaming spurs at Lorne Lanning's Oddworld Inhabitants, where they were key figures in the development of the award-winning (and creatively stunning) *Abe* and *Munch* titles. The duo scans the black walls of the studio's Vault as O'Connor, another Oddworld alumnus, explains the world-class art that blankets them. There's a shot of a Western town that looks as if Jules Verne and Mad Max gave it a makeover—the bank, a staple of the cowboy genre, is ironclad, castlelike. Gothic. Beneath that is a rogues' gallery of characters from the sweet to the unsavory, from regular townsfolk to huge, trembling mounds of flesh with mouths where their heads should be. And in the center of it all, a lone figure in a black coat and hat stands poised with wraithlike fingers, clutching a gun that looks as if it could blow your soul clean off.

"Jericho finds himself thrust into this supernatural battle for survival between the Darkwatch and the vampires," O'Connor explains. "So, his whole world turns upside down because he lives in the American West, and he's not supposed to be running into these creatures. He blows up the vault, but what he doesn't understand is that the vault doesn't contain gold. It contains this ancient evil—horrific monsters and our chief bad guy."

The bad guy is still under wraps, but the twinkle in Ulm's eye is enough to give you nightmares. As it turns out, Jericho is bitten by the Vampire Lord of the Undead (oops!) and begins the slow descent into vampirism. Good for seeing in the dark, jumping, and dodging bullets, not so good for social skills. And it's not like he was particularly chatty in the first place. But far from being a disembodied arm holding a fancy gun, as

XB PC PS2 GBA GC

is so often the case with first-person heroes, O'Connor wants Jericho to evolve as a complex character.

"What we try to do with our stories and our characters," he emphasizes, "is give the players what they want. If I was going to put you in the Old West with an arsenal of outrageous weapons and these vampiric powers, it seems to me unreasonable to expect you to act like a choirboy. Jericho is a considerably more tormented character than, say, Clint Eastwood in *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly*. No matter what Eastwood does, he gets off scot-free, whereas Jericho has a much greater emotional stake in his story."

THE DARKWATCH

A secret organization dedicated to the destruction of the vampires, the Darkwatch is Jericho's chief ally. Following the epic train battle, so the plot goes, only one member of the Darkwatch team survives, and thank the Lord it's not the 65-year-old matronly woman with the blue rinse and wooden teeth.

The buxom Cassidy Sharp would be the kind of gal Jericho could take home to meet the folks were she not wearing, you know, the skin of dead vampires.

"The Darkwatch treat the vampires the way the Native Americans treated the buffalo," says O'Connor, with obvious relish. "When they are killed, nothing is wasted. The regenerative power of vampire skin makes it an ideal form of body armor. But obviously, the line between good and evil gets a little blurred when you start learning how to use the vampires' own weapons against them."

This is the point where the story and character designs begin to intersect with the game code. To reach Sammy's stated goal of creating a living West that reacts to the way you play, the game needs to track all kinds of variables, such as how ready you are to shoot people, how discerning you are about who gets the bullet, and how much of a vampire you are. The townspeople aren't going to be too thrilled about you riding in on your black horse with your red glowing eyes to begin with, and your reputation will precede you.

I LIKE WHAT YOU'VE DONE WITH THE PLACE

Jericho's personal goal is to save his soul, but in the meantime, he throws his lot in with the Darkwatch and is trained and sent out on missions. The game is broadly divided into three acts, similar to a movie. The first act is the setup. There's the train robbery and Jericho's training at the cozy Darkwatch citadel (complete with semiconscious vampires hung from hooks on the ceiling—nice!), and then the game opens into the missions.

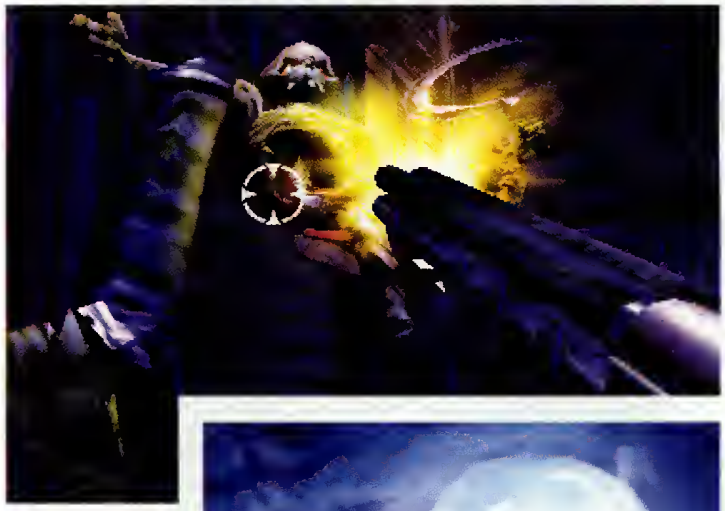
"The beginning of the game is pretty linear because we want players to learn the controls," Ulm says. "We also want them to understand what's taking place, so it's heavily scripted. The middle portion of the game offers a lot more freedom of action, and then in the end, in the final act, we squeeze the whole thing back down again to a pulse-pounding conclusion. So right from the beginning, the pace and the player's emotion—what they feel as they're playing the game—is superimportant."

Ulm regards the wall of the Vault as the creative heart of the project. Just around the corner, the art department, headed by Farzad Varahramyan, works late into the night on concepts for everything from weapons to carriages to tables and chairs. They're creating the Old West, but they're also building the much more elaborate and imaginative *Darkwatch* world that takes established forms and twists them into something new and foreboding. The obvious challenge for the team is to find a way to take this detailed, often beautiful art and translate it into code without killing it in the process.

To that end, Sammy has built a set of tools from scratch. Every night, the system updates the *Darkwatch* game world with all the new art and objects that have been created that day so the designers and programmers can see everything as the gamer will eventually see it. Sammy's approach seems particularly well thought out and directed specifically at moving the art on the page to the TV screen with a minimum of interference.

O'Connor comes at these tools from the other side. He's concerned less with the art than with the mechanics and layout. He labors first on paper, works out the kinks, and then uses the toolset to construct levels in 3D. Even at this early stage, the team can drop monsters into towns, activate the A.I., and see how they run.

Jericho sits atop a galloping horse as O'Connor leads him through a ravine, all the while targeting the ghouls that leap up from behind rocks (whenever the player is on a horse or in one of the vehicles, the game switches from first-person to a third-person view). The motion-captured animations and the art team's obvious talent conspire to



→ The team is acutely aware of the need for variation in the gameplay. To that end, *Darkwatch* gives you a fair bit of riding and exploring to do, as well as the option to drive a *Halo*-style armored jeep (see page 70).

XB
PC
PS2
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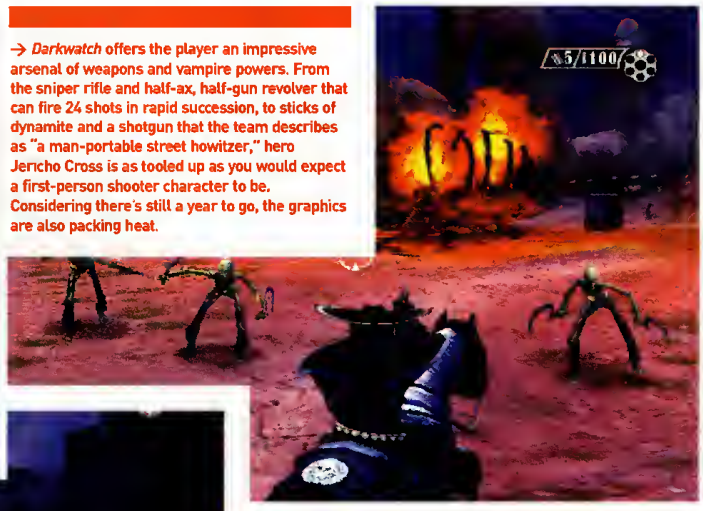
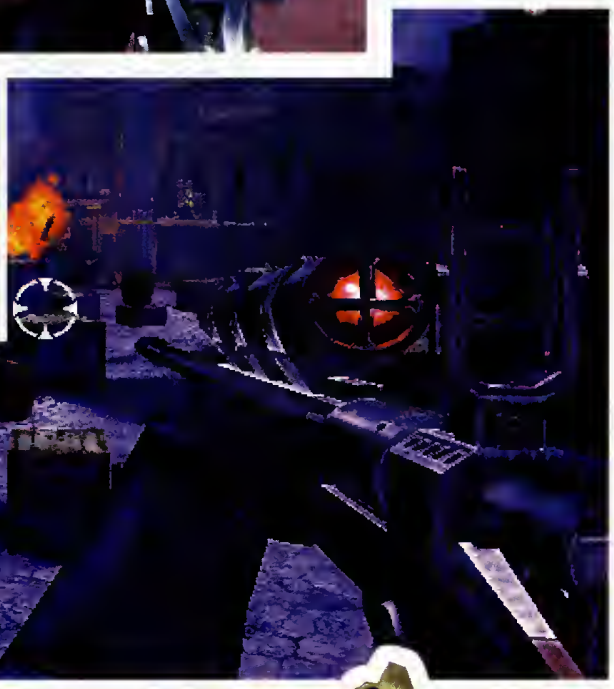
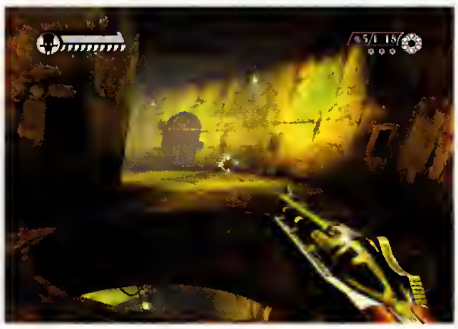
YOUR FIRST LOOK AT
Darkwatch: Curse of the West

→ *Darkwatch* offers the player an impressive arsenal of weapons and vampire powers. From the sniper rifle and half-ax, half-gun revolver that can fire 24 shots in rapid succession, to sticks of dynamite and a shotgun that the team describes as "a man-portable street howitzer," hero Jericho Cross is as tooled up as you would expect a first-person shooter character to be. Considering there's still a year to go, the graphics are also packing heat.







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create a believable world. O'Connor taps the PS2's controller, and Jericho leaps from the saddle over some rocks before landing gracefully, switching back to first-person view, and removing the "un" from an undead with his shotgun. Pushing relentlessly forward, he drops one after another.

"Jericho loads up a magazine with four tumblers every time," O'Connor says proudly. "When he runs out of bullets, an entire tumbler ejects out of the gun. He was a marksman before he became a vampire, but now he's this supermarksman. Now he's a guy that shoots 24 times while jumping through the air."

O'Connor is clearly enjoying himself. Perhaps a little too much. Forgetting himself, he gets a nudge from the others to reveal another level.

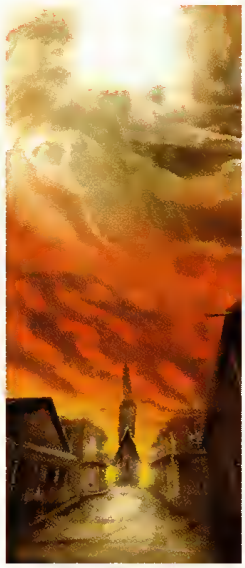
In the final game, you can expect to visit an Indian village, the Darkwatch citadel, the train, a cemetery, some seminormal (read: vampire infested) Western towns, and some currently still-secret locations.

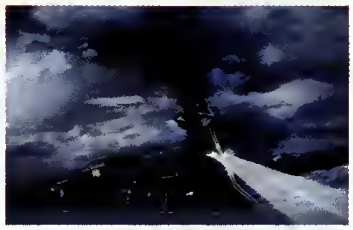
In short order, he drops into a test level—in this one-horse town, he begins making his way down the street, spurs clinking in the dusk. Vampires leap out from behind carts and crates. Some throw dynamite and duck back under cover. These are the grunts, and they are none too smart. Most are dispatched quickly. As he rounds a corner, a vampire gunslinger presents more of a challenge....

VAMPIRE LEGACY

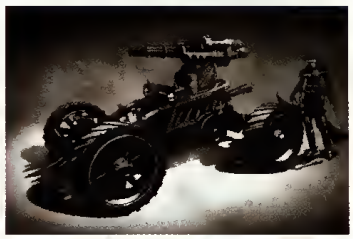
"The best thing about Sammy," Ulm says, "is that we started from scratch, [which] is also the worst thing. We didn't inherit anything—no people, no tech, not even a building. All of what you see here had to be built over the past two years. Every aspect of it."

With almost a year to go before *Darkwatch* is ready for its close-up, Ulm, O'Connor, Varahramyan, and their teams have much to do. The graphics you see in these screens will improve as lighting effects, bump-mapping (for the Xbox version), and design tweaks add polish to what is already an atmospheric and well-crafted world. The creation of this world has built a studio, and regardless of how *Darkwatch* does commercially, the technology and talent of its teams will pay dividends long after Jericho Cross has reclaimed his soul from the Vampire Lord of the Undead.





→ *Darkwatch*'s art features what Paul O'Connor calls visual DNA: common elements of styling, colors, and tone that tie everything together. Photo: Chris Ulm's shadow-puppet routine never fails to amuse Farzad Varahramyan and Paul O'Connor.



THE MASTER PLAN

SAMMY STUDIOS WANTS TO BE BIG--REALLY BIG.

Sammy is a huge, $2 billion a year company in Japan. Almost all of its cash comes from the highly profitable pachinko machines it manufactures and either rents or sells to arcades and pachinko parlors. The games are a mixture of pinball and slot machines, and playing pachinko is virtually the national pastime. Eying the lucrative U.S. videogame market, the company hired John Rowe—an industry veteran whose résumé includes SNK, arcade importers, Tradewest, and Midway—to start Sammy Studios. But that's only the beginning of the company's ambition.

"Suffice it to say," Rowe says, "Sammy is going to grow, and that growth is going to come from videogames. We've got a lot of work to do. It's a real team effort. Putting these folks together and giving them an opportunity to create something is really what we're about. At the same time, we're developing our own pipeline of technology and really, as much as what we're doing now is important, we are really building something long term."

As well as occupying a huge space in San Diego and working on at least three other projects besides *Darkwatch*, Sammy has recently opened offices in L.A., with an eye toward making connections in Hollywood. *Darkwatch: The Movie*, anyone?

As if to underline its plans for world domination, as *GMR* was going to press, Sammy announced that following a brief flirtation with buying Sega last year, it has purchased a huge amount of shares in the struggling game giant. Rumor has it that the two companies have already begun talks regarding numerous opportunities for future collaboration.

→ Cassidy Sharp is the love interest in *Darkwatch: Curse of the West*. Like all sexy gals, she prefers the soft, silky feel of vampire skin to cotton. And who can blame her?

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IN THE FAST

LIFE IN THE FAST LANE WITH KAZUNOAI YAMAUCHI

GMR spent some time with the creator of the _Gran Turismo_ series, Polyphony Digital's Kazunori Yamauchi, at the 2003 SEMA (Specialty Equipment Market Association) show. We discussed _Gran Turismo 4_, a game seemingly poised to further distance itself from the rest of the pack with more than 500 real-world cars and the most realistic graphics in a racing game yet. We also talked about Logitech's 900-degree steering wheel, the death of arcade racing games, and the burgeoning U.S. tuning scene.

PS2

GMR: Let's warm up by asking what you're looking forward to seeing at the SEMA show.

KY: You might find this very strange, but this will be my first time at the SEMA show. I heard that the show is very big in scale, very exciting, very interesting. In those terms, I am very excited to be able to have the chance to be there for myself. And also, for the first time, to get my eyes and hands on the U.S. tuning-car culture and actually get a feel of it. I've heard about it and read about it, but I've never really been there. Also, I am very interested to see how the trend works in the States. I know how it takes place in Japan, since I live there, but I am very interested to see how it has grown in the U.S. and where it is now. So, many interests!

GMR: What sorts of differences do you see between the Japanese and American tuning markets? They make a lot of games in Japan incorporating aftermarket parts and drifting, and that seems to be picking up in the U.S.

KY: It is very difficult right now to evaluate where the differences would be. What I know so far from the input that is available—for instance, *The Fast and the Furious*—[is] that it took off here in the States and is very big, but I don't know how that falls into place in the industry itself. So I am very curious to find out. As far as I have perceived so far—one of the examples you gave was drifting—we have many subcultures in the car industry in Japan, many of which are very narrow but deep. How that [changes] when it comes to the States is an unknown factor, but I think it will be a wider audience in comparison to Japan, and I'm curious to know where it will go in the future. A very good example, again, would be *The Fast and the Furious*. In Japan, like I explained, that kind of underground culture would be very narrow and deep. It would not be possible in Japan to make a movie based on street racing and have it be a major movie in the movie industry. Not because it's illegal, but because not many people are interested. It's a very small, narrow market.

GMR: Considering the number of tuning games that come out in Japan, you'd think the movement was huge.

KY: It's actually the opposite. I feel that people in the U.S. are better at creating lifestyles out of an interest like that in comparison to Japan. So it's funny that you say that.

GMR: The original focus of _GT_ was to offer a wide selection of cars, but it didn't concentrate so much on the tuning. In the United States, customizing is everything. _Gran Turismo_ doesn't let you mess with much of that stuff.

KY: This has been an area that my team and I have always wanted to do since the first *GT*. For instance, when players continue to modify cars, some cars have the LM version—that was like the final stage of modification. Right now, my team and I are still trying to tackle that task for GT4. It is a very difficult task.

GMR: Does it become more difficult to accomplish all these little features with so many cars to choose from? Where do you place your restrictions? When do you say, "This is as far as we're going to go"?

KY: Well, looking at the grand total list of more than 500 cars, in the real world, consumers who look at those cars don't necessarily tend to modify, say, a minivan. So, we will concentrate more on those cars that have a demand for modification for obvious reasons. That could be an area that will help us draw the line.

GMR: You underestimate our love for minivans. Will the online aspects of the game help with that? You could incorporate more downloadable cars and features in the future.

KY: It's a possibility, yes. The online features of *GT4* will obviously help magnify the excitement of the game itself that we will be

LANF

AND GAAN TUAISMO 4

able to provide—it should be a whole new factor, and I am very excited about that. Whether the game is standalone or online compatible is not the issue; the fact that it is online compatible will allow for players to play in a different style, and that itself is exciting and interesting.

GMR: When you first started *GT*, it was difficult to get the participation of all the manufacturers for a number of reasons. Now, because the game is so beautiful and realistic, it seems like everybody wants to be a part of *Gran Turismo*. How has that changed things?

KY: The approach from the automotive industry toward *GT* has changed significantly, as you said. *GT* has, more and more, taken part in motor shows and other automotive events such as SEMA. In a lot of cases, the industry has approached us and suggested collaborations. So, we've come this far.

GMR: Do auto manufacturers now look at *GT* as a way to debut new models? Do they look at this as a great device to show their new models to the young buying public?

KY: One very good example of that would be a title called *GT Concept*, which we released in Japan and Europe. The day we unveiled *Concept* was the first day of the Tokyo Motor Show. The Nissan GTR Concept, which is on the cover, was unveiled on the same day at both the Tokyo Motor Show 2001 and in *Gran Turismo*. So people saw the unveiling of the actual car at the venue, and they were also able to see the playable in the game. I think that collaborations and cross-promotions like this will take place more often as we proceed.

GMR: Why did we never get to see the *Concept* games—*Tokyo* or *Tokyo Geneva*—in the United States? Were there licensing issues, or was the U.S. just not ready for a title like this?

KY: Speaking so far, *GT1*, *2*, and *3* have come. At that point, we decided that we didn't want to distract the market by releasing a nonmainstream title in terms of the *Gran Turismo* franchise. We believe that in the U.S. market, it's better to release the full-scale games.

GMR: Back in 1998, racing games typically had a maximum of three or four cars to choose from and none of the cool reflection-mapping effects seen in *GT*. Now that other development teams are gaining parity, how will you continue to distinguish the *GT* series?

KY: Well, looking at our competitors' racing games, I feel that—whether or not this is intentional or not—we notice trends where a lot of other games adapt or relate to the style of *GT*. Again, this is probably done unintentionally. Like you said, the world of *GT* changed the whole racing-game genre.

GMR: Do you feel that *GT* has brought about the death of arcade racing games? It seems like every publisher has abandoned old-school arcade racing and is now trying to do real-world car models with realistic handling. How do you feel about that?

KY: At the current Tokyo Motor Show that ends today, we have a simulator located in our booth area that people can actually sit in and play a demo of *GT4*. It's very accurate and very realistic, and I feel confident to say that the experience players will get by using this simulator will exceed any other racing game that they have seen in the arcade as of today. That said, I feel that somewhere along the line—who knows when—but eventually, there is a possibility for *Gran Turismo* to go [to the] arcade. When we do, that will completely change the racing-game genre in the arcade sector.

GMR: How far do you think you can actually take the series in terms of realism before it becomes just like driving a real car? Which, exciting as it can be, can also be not exciting.

KY: I feel that currently, as you say, one of the targets is to become more realistic. It always has been and always will be. However, that's only because from both the hardware and software side, as of now, it cannot be achieved. But theoretically, virtual experiences should easily exceed real life in many ways and have the potential to do so in many ways. Realism is not my goal—it's only a point that I pass in terms of developing *GT*.

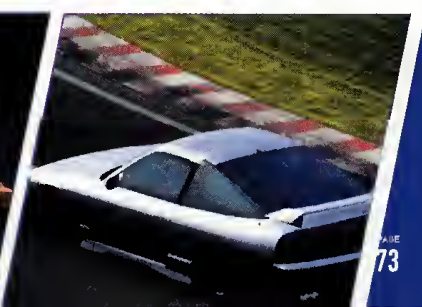
GMR: All the cars in the game are real models. Are there any design enthusiasts on the team, ex-*Motor Toon* staff perhaps, who would like to put their own 3D car designs in the game?

KY: One of my ideas is to create cars from scratch. So, of course designing a car could be interesting. Not in terms of throwing one into the game, but rather, I would like to create one in real life.

GMR: One of the minor criticisms about *Gran Turismo 3* was that there were certain tactics that you could exploit against the computer A.I. during races, such as bouncing off of cars to correct your lines. Have you addressed any of the A.I. issues for *GT4*?

KY: When we study those cases, no matter how [much] we achieve with the computer-A.I.-driven cars, we cannot keep players from intentionally hitting the A.I. cars as they did in *GT3*. In the first *Gran Turismo*, the physics were not right. In reality, usually, if two cars hit each other, they would both spin out. Players should also be penalized for rough driving, since in reality, you don't go hitting other cars. There is a plan for *GT4* right now to

GAME DEVELOPMENT IS A PROCESS. AND THE GOAL IS TO DRIVE THE WORLD'S BEST CARS.



display a black flag for rough driving.

GMR: Will *GT4* feature the same sort of introductory license test? What is the goal of the license test?

KY: That is a very good question. In the past, the license tests included in the *Gran Turismo* franchise were centered on developing the driving skills of the players, and only that. In *GT4*, of course we will have license tests for the purpose of educating newcomers to the franchise, but they will not only look at driving skills, but also at driving manners. It all goes back to what we were discussing earlier—no matter what we achieve in the A.I. and the actual physics, unless players change their way of playing, we cannot avoid the same problems. They will constantly do the same thing. So that's the direction we hope to drive players, and hopefully that will help them get started in *GT4*.

GMR: A lot of other games encourage bad driving because of the poor controls. If you were able to drive properly, it wouldn't be such an issue.

KY: A thought that came to mind as you explained that—if we go online, for instance, we could curb rough driving by penalizing their license. For instance, we could suspend them from participating in a race or maybe multiple races for a certain period of time. We are trying to encourage polite driving, of course.

GMR: How closely does Polyphony work with Logitech? Whose idea was it to develop a wheel that allows 900 degrees of rotation to successfully emulate real-world driving?

KY: When we first started work on *GT3*, I approached Logitech with a wish list of things to do with the steering controller. Initially, there were a number of things we couldn't accomplish, such as the 900-degree rotation, so these tasks were carried forward and had to be tackled later. What you see now is the result. We feel that the result is the ideal, optimal racing-simulation tool.

GMR: How big is the Polyphony Digital team, and do they solely work on *Gran Turismo*?

KY: The team is roughly 70 people. And yes, they only work on *GT*. I would like to do something else sometime, though.

GMR: If you could pick one car to race in *Gran Turismo 4*, which would it be?

KY: It's such a tough call that I can't really choose one! When we originally started *GT*, the range of cars was much smaller, and it was easier to choose one ideal car to use in the game. It was easy—just pick the fastest one. But because *GT4* has such a wide range of cars, there's no particular one that I would choose to play throughout.

GMR: What's your favorite type of car in real life?

KY: Front engine, rear drive. This is the type of car I drive in real life.

GMR: Has the team expanded the rally driving for *Gran Turismo 4*?

KY: I was happy with the rally levels in *GT3*, but I think that by adding more fields or atmospheres within that rally mode will be our biggest target for *GT4*. It will create a whole new experience for the players.

GMR: Tell us a little about *Gran Turismo Prologue* [an import-only demo disc]. What percentage of *Gran Turismo 4* does it represent?

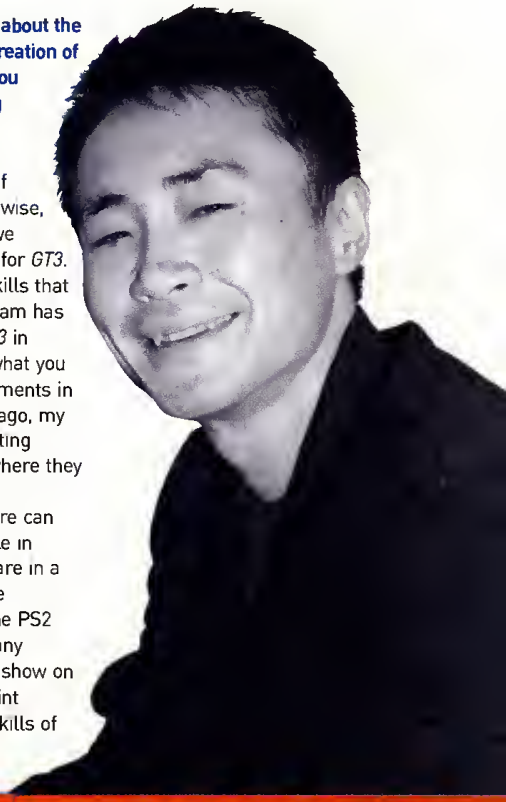
KY: It represents about 10 percent of *GT4*. *Prologue* is positioned as a driving school, [as well as] an entry-level *Gran Turismo* game. So that's the whole concept of the game. The majority of the game will be driving-school mode. There will be arcade mode, of course, but it will be smaller in comparison to the driving school.

GMR: Have you learned more about the PS2 hardware to enable the creation of better-looking cars, or have you concentrated more on making better-looking backgrounds?

KY: To answer the first part of your question, programming-wise, my team and I extracted all we could with the PS2 hardware for *GT3*. However, there are human skills that accompany that, which the team has built significantly on since *GT3* in comparison to now. A lot of what you see now is based on improvements in the team. Maybe six months ago, my team and I studied other existing titles, their technology, and where they are in comparison to what performance the PS2 hardware can provide. I'm pretty comfortable in saying that most developers are in a similar stage where they have extracted all they can from the PS2 hardware in terms of how many polygons per second you can show on the screen, etc. From that point forward, it goes back to the skills of the artists [and] how they manipulate those technologies and how they maximize what is available to them on the platform. And that's where my team has shown really large-scale growth.

GMR: What's the most fun part of your job?

KY: Game development is a process, and the goal is to drive the world's best cars! So far, I've achieved my goal, and I'd like to continue.



FRONT ENGINE, REAR DRIVE. THIS IS THE TYPE OF CAR I DRIVE IN REAL LIFE.

YOU'RE MOTORIN'

KICKING THE TIRES. SPINNING THE WHEELS. GOOD TIMES

The inaugural *Gran Turismo 4* Awards were presented at the Palms Hotel's Ghost Bar as part of 2003's SEMA auto show. At the Las Vegas–based event, Polyphony Digital frontman Kazunori Yamauchi inspected over 100 contestants' vehicles on the show floor. The grand prize winner would have his or her car featured in *Gran Turismo 4*'s final lineup of over 500 vehicles.

Once the contestants and their guests filed into Ghostbar late in the evening, awards were presented for Best Japanese Import, Best European Import, Best Domestic Auto, Best Truck/SUV, and Best Hot Rod. Yamauchi then announced that the overall *Gran Turismo 4* Best in Show award would go to Ted and Sue Richardson for their 1962 Buick Special. When the game ships in 2004, gamers will be able to put the '62 Buick through its paces just like any other car in the game. We're sure Ted and Sue are very proud.

← Kazunori Yamauchi checks out some sexy wheels and asks himself, "You think that's a straight six?" The *Gran Turismo 4* Awards featured the appearance of retired Indy driver Arie Luyendyk (below center), but more importantly, *GMR* editors Simon Cox and James Mielke (above), who managed to impress all with their elite virtual-driving skills.

PS2
GBA
PC
GAMECUBE
XBOX
PS2

NOW

It's a brand-new year, gang, and with that comes a sack full of brand-new games. Oh, and some old ones too. But mostly new. This month we get the $%#!! scared out of us and biomods implanted where the sun don't shine—we also take our boards out for a powder. What makes the cut and what doesn't? Take a look inside and find out!

HOW WE RATE

WARNING!! WHERE MULTIPLE VERSIONS OF A GAME ARE REVIEWED, *GMR* WILL MENTION DIFFERENCES ONLY IF THEY SIGNIFICANTLY AFFECT THE GAMEPLAY!

YOUR GUIDE TO THE GMR SCORING SYSTEM

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WRATH UNLEASHED	PS2/XB	090

← One nice concession to the ever-swelling, oft-overlooked ranks of female gamers is the option to play as an Alex of the boy or girl variety. Gerry, while a common girl's name, is just too butch, don't you think?

XB
PC

DEUS EX 2: INVISIBLE WAR

EPIC, CONFUSING, RAMBLING, AND UTTERLY COMPELLING

MATURE | XBOX [REVIEWED] | PC

PUBLISHER: EIDOS INTERACTIVE
DEVELOPER: ION STORM
PRICE: $49.99
RELEASE: AVAILABLE NOW
PLAYERS: 1
ORIGIN: U.S.A.

GMR ESSENTIAL SELECTION

About two hours into Warren Spector's second *Deus Ex* adventure, you accidentally begin to have fun. It's not something that creeps up on you—it just suddenly hits you, like stepping on a carpet tack in the middle of the night.

You suddenly forget about the fact that the hero is the kind of guy you could cheerfully smack in the head just for being so utterly limp (isn't he supposed to be a tough cyborg-in-training?). You sort of let it slide that this game has more factions than 7-Eleven has flavors of soft drinks.

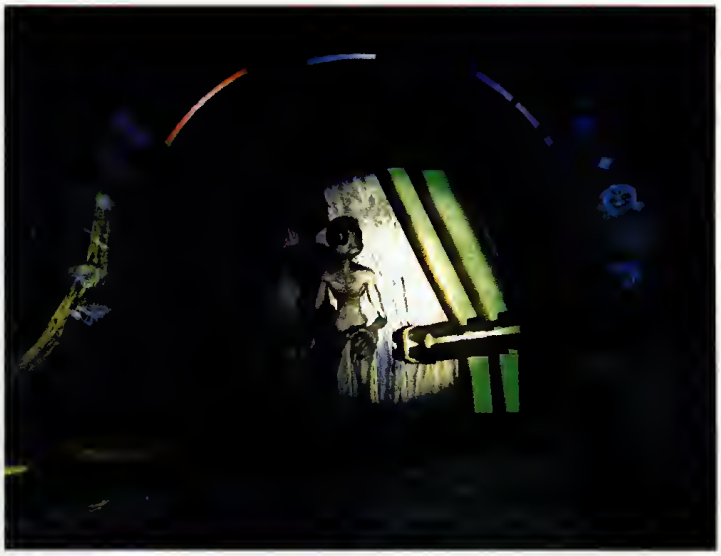
You forgive *Invisible War* this because it is, without a doubt, one of the most ambitious and cleverly constructed games you can find.

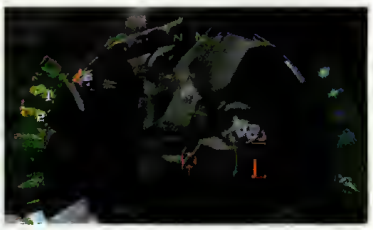
The plot is convoluted, to say the least, but like *Deus Ex: The Conspiracy*, it involves evil corporations trying to control a future Earth that is increasingly divided into the haves and have-nots. As an evil corporation's agent-in-training, it's your job to investigate a terrorist attack on Chicago, and while you're at it, try to figure out just whose side you're on.

If you played the first game, *Invisible War* will feel more than familiar. Old names pop up, such as Tracer Tong and *Conspiracy* hero JC Denton, who is now, 20 years later, living in a secret antarctic base (which is presumably a hundred degrees in the shade). If you're late to the party, however, you might find things more than a little confusing.

Whereas the original favored adventure and a more linear mission structure, *Invisible War* lets you noodle around doing tasks for various characters and factions in order to build cash reserves or weapon stocks, or to improve the power-ups (called biomods) your character possesses.

Most of these tasks dovetail nicely with your wider objectives, but they occasionally feel like busywork—a situation not at all helped by the measly amount of cash to be found around the levels. Ditto for ammunition, although that's no doubt





← The PC version of *Invisible War*, when humming gently along on your Nvidia or ATI super chipset, looks an awful lot better than the Xbox version. The higher resolution and extra shading add greatly to the atmosphere.

XB
PC

designed to nudge you gently in the direction of nonviolence.

So, eventually you abandon your usual gaming sensibilities (being led around by the tip of your, uh, shotgun) and begin to think for yourself. As you follow your own admittedly suspect moral compass through this dystopian future, the plot slowly crystallizes.

As it does, something very cool happens: You begin to know who you are. You begin to make sense of the world and your place in it. You stop shooting everyone you meet before they can say "Hi," and you begin to feel as if something very important is about to happen. And, eventually, it does.

But this is still a world where the hero, when told he's not from around here, replies without much irony, "Area 51? My parents said we were from Palm Springs." And alien grays, set free in one of your more sympathetic moments, complain about humans and then, with their enormous cosmic intelligence presumably failing them, proceed to walk into walls repeatedly. We may stick pins in them and rub dog shampoo into their eyes, but at least we can find the bathroom unassisted.

But it's easy to find the odd glitch or crap one-liner crushingly disappointing when presented with such an ambitious game. The fact is, *Invisible War* is no better and no worse a game than its predecessor, and there's absolutely no shame in that.

And it's no airport novel, either, as it requires some serious time investment. But the rewards are worth it, because when *Invisible War* is good, it is very, very good indeed. ▮◀

_Simon Cox

GMR NEARLY DIVINE **9/10**

BETTER THAN. UNREAL 2
NOT AS GOOD AS. METROID PRIME
WAIT FOR IT. HALF-LIFE 2. OF COURSE!

2ND OPINION

The original *Deus Ex* was truly open-ended, but *Invisible War* is a console-friendly "lite" version. It looks great, but the focus is on hauling your fists do the talking. If you can forgive the broken A.I., you'll probably have a blast. ▮◀

_Darren Gladstone, Computer Gaming World

← *1080° Avalanche* features, if nothing else, a heck of a lot of fan-service, like NES boards, and other delectable treats. It certainly adds incentive for replaying the game repeatedly, even if the actual game does not. Pity about the multiplayer action.

1080° AVALANCHE

COULDA BEEN, SHOULDA BEEN

EVERYONE | GC

PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
DEVELOPER: NST
PRICE: $49.99
RELEASE: AVAILABLE NOW
PLAYERS: 1-4 (LAN)
ORIGIN: U.S.A.

When Nintendo Software Technology revived the *Wave Race* franchise for GameCube, it did so in a perfectly functional way that captured the spirit of the rip-roaring original while updating the graphics for the next generation. It also mucked with the controls.

In a case of major foreshadowing, NST has once again spun their particular coding-dust on another genre-defining N64 title and whipped up *1080° Avalanche*, a game that offers some thrilling powder-in-your-face racing and, tragically, little else.

What *Avalanche* does right is give the gamer the sickest sense of speed in any snowboarding game to date. It's like *Wipeout* on fiberglass, and that's no small feat. The character designs are nicer than the competition's, too, but once you get over these minor pluses, the game begins to crumble.

While the original N64 game set standards for controls and graphics, *Avalanche* merely toes the line, while adding an annoying balance function (you spin the analog stick when you've lost your footing) that is absolutely irritating during a close high-speed race. One almost wishes for the return of the old *1080°* damage meter.

Other hang-ups, like getting stuck in game-ending crevices, a painfully rudimentary trick system, and severely limited multiplayer options (four-player splitscreen or four-player LAN hookups), relegate *Avalanche* to "coulda been" status in no time flat. Plus, the highly touted avalanche portions are more gimmicky than integral.

What's offered is competent and, in a nostalgic way, solid old-school fun. But in an age when the competition is offering so much more, Nintendo would do well to take notes.

_James Mielke

GMR DUSTED **7/10**

BETTER THAN: AMPED
NOT AS FEATURE-RICH AS: SSX 3
ALSO TRY: GO GO HYPERGRIND

2ND OPINION

When NST messed around with the controls in *Wave Race Blue Storm*, initial irritation gave way to appreciation of the subtle depth. But *1080° Avalanche*'s "rotating the stick to maintain balance" business is unnecessary bunk. There was nothing wrong with how the original played, so why mess with it?

_Andrew Pfister

GC

POKEMON CHANNEL

NO GROWN-UPS ALLOWED

EVERYONE | GC

Calling *Pokémon Channel* a game is kinda stretching the definition. It's more of a cross between a virtual pet and one of those edutainment titles from Humongous (*Pajama Sam*, *Putt-Putt*, etc.).

Pokémon Channel's gameplay revolves around watching *Pokémon*-themed TV shows with an adopted Pikachu, as well as traveling with the little rodent to several outdoor locations, where some point-and-click exploration allows you to interact with other Pocket Monsters. Since new TV channels and other features open up the more you play and explore, there's an incentive to come back day after day.

Even with the exploration bits, the bulk of the game is focused on watching television, which isn't very interactive. Sure, there's the odd trivia question to answer on the quiz show, and you use the money you win to buy goodies on the home-shopping channel, but that's about it—a lot of the game feels very passive.

Considering that *Pokémon Channel*'s audience is meant to be very young, the game relies heavily on the ability to read, which is odd. Parents will probably have to play this one along with their toddlers. When they do, they'll find a fun but flawed kids' game.

_Phil Theobald

PUB NINTENDO
DEV AMBRELLA
REL AVAILABLE NOW
PRICE $29.99
PLAYERS 1
ORIGIN JAPAN

GMR

PIKA! PIKA!

6/10

BETTER THAN HEY YOU, PIKACHU!
NOT AS GOOD AS ANYTHING BY HUMONGOUS
WAIT FOR IT: POKÉMON COLOSSEUM

PC

GC

URU: AGES BEYOND MYST

GORGEOUS CONFUSION ONLINE...OR NOT

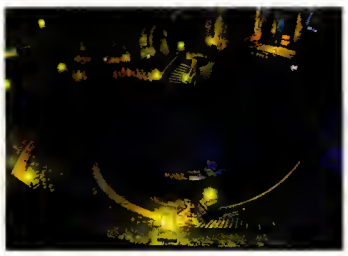
EVERYONE | PC

***Uru* sounded intriguing: It promised to break the standard online mold by delivering hours of gorgeous, head-scratching fun for players to ponder together. Could an online game without killing or experience points really work? We wish we could tell you—*Uru* hasn't managed to shake one MMO trend, the awful launch—it won't actually be online until February 2004. Oops!**

Until then, we do have a pretty satisfying adventure to play, though. While the addition of basic platforming to the *Myst* formula is questionable, the game remains engrossing and mysteriously compelling. It's a little short, but you can pay to add new worlds, story, and other players. *Uru* might also be the most beautiful game to date, featuring amazing real-time graphics and luscious sound to match.

Even without online play, *Uru* wins points for style and originality. Diehard *Myst* fans probably already have it, but others may want to wait until February to see if the whole online thing pays off.

_Darryl Vassar



PUB UBISOFT
DEV CYAN WORLDS
REL AVAILABLE NOW
PRICE $49.99
PLAYERS 1
ORIGIN U.S.A.

GMR

INCOMPLETE

6/10

BETTER THAN REAL MYST
NOT AS GOOD AS BEYOND GOOD & EVIL
WAIT FOR IT: TO BE FINISHED

PAC-MAN VS.

HEY, BOREDOM! EAT ME!

EVERYONE | GC

In 1980, Namco introduced *Pac-Man*, a rather simple arcade game that features a manly yellow ball that navigates through mazes and eats smaller yellow balls before he himself is devoured by a malevolent patrol of colored ghosts.

Now, 23 years later, through several generations of technologically marvelous hardware and numerous innovations in the way gaming software is designed, the Shigeru Miyamoto-developed *Pac-Man Vs.* offers...pretty much the same thing, but with four players.

But hey, we liked it back then, and we really like it now. With only one Game Boy Advance required to play (single player is not an option, sadly), *Pac-Man Vs.* is a great realization of Nintendo's much-vaunted connectivity strategy

The game is designed to be played in short bursts: Players select one of six mazes and play the game as it was intended: Three ghosts hunt down Pac-Man. If they catch him, they get the points. If Pac-Man clears the maze, he gets the points. Simple.

The good news is that *Pac-Man Vs.* is absolutely free. The sort of bad news is that the only way to get it is by purchasing *R: Racing Evolution*, *I-Ninja*, or the greatest-hits reissue of *Pac-Man World 2*. If you were already going to buy any of those games (*Pac-Man World 2*'s a pretty good game in its own right and the least costly option), then hey, it's still pretty good news.

_Andrew Pfister

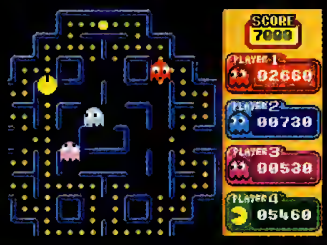
PUB NAMCO
DEV NINTENDO
REL AVAILABLE NOW
PRICE FREE!
PLAYERS 2-4
ORIGIN JAPAN

GMR

CHERRY

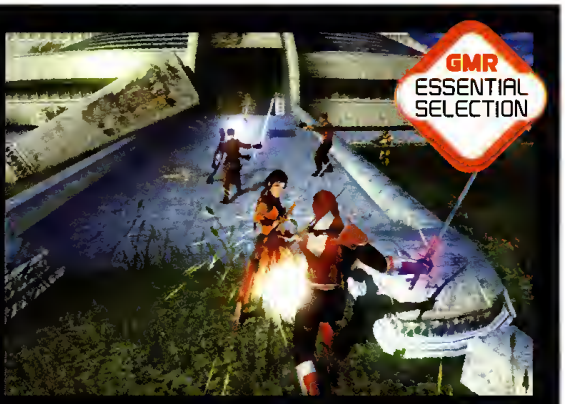
8/10

BETTER THAN: ASTEROIDS
NOT AS GOOD AS: ZELDA COMPILATION DISC
WAIT FOR IT: ZELDA FOUR SWORDS



STAR WARS: KOTOR
BE SURE TO USE THE FORCE

TEEN | PC | XB



As Xbox owners already know, *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic* is the best thing to happen to console RPGs in years. PC gamers, on the other hand, are probably already more than a little familiar with BioWare's efforts (*MDK2*, *Baldur's Gate*) and might have seen this coming, but the results are laudable nonetheless.

A game pitted with scores of moral choices at nearly every turn, *KOTOR* excels in allowing the player to go where he wants, when he wants. A star-swept epic (complete with kick-ass scripting and voice acting) whose events sway with the player's gravitations toward either the light side or the dark, *KOTOR*'s events can be played in nearly any order, giving the player a tremendous sense of freedom that, while not as sprawling as *Morrowind*'s, offers excellent replay value.

But *KOTOR*'s meat and potatoes is its stellar battle engine. With not a random battle in sight, experience is gained through, among other things, talking to NPCs and advancing the story line. Battles are deliberately placed, and while the experience-level cap might be lower than that of a *Final Fantasy* game, level ups in *KOTOR* mean more. Likewise, players can shape the events to come through robust character customization.

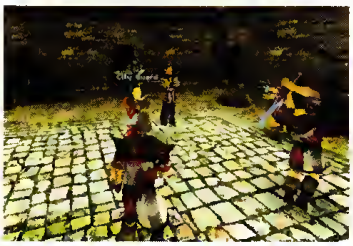
The bottom line? *KOTOR* is a modern-day masterpiece that will be talked about for years to come. It's not the best-looking RPG ever made, and the early launch of the PC game was plagued by irritating bugs and incompatibilities, but anyone with a yen for roleplaying (and maybe some high-quality *Star Wars* action) would do well to pick this classic up *now*.

_James Mielke

PUB	LUCASARTS	PRICE	$44.99
DEV	BIOWARE	PLAYERS	1
REL	AVAILABLE NOW	ORIGIN	U.S.A.

GMR PEERLESS 10/10

BETTER THAN: FINAL FANTASY X-2
NOT AS OPEN-ENDED AS: MORROWIND
WAIT FOR IT: JADE EMPIRE



GOTHIC II
HAIR-PULLING HARD

MATURE | PC

I wouldn't be surprised if *Gothic II*'s developers walk around their office wearing tight leather and vinyl with whips and riding crops at their sides. These guys seem to have a fetish for difficulty that borders on the sadistic.

You want proof? How about an action game that forces you to edit a systems file before you can activate shortcut keys for quicksaves or potions? Or perhaps a sequel that strips you of all previously acquired power and leaves you weaker than the average farmer's wife?

Gothic II is a sprawling action-RPG with the usual "defeat the newly awakened evil" plot. The 3D game world is wonderfully open-ended and filled with amazing detail. There are hundreds of NPCs, dozens of subquests, hordes of monsters to kill, and no load times between regions.

There's enough game here to easily keep you occupied for 40-plus hours, especially with three career paths and their unique quests. Unfortunately, this playtime is artificially prolonged by ridiculous amounts of difficulty. The clunky and unresponsive control scheme is bad enough, but you start so weak that you're forced to do a lot of mindless leveling up before you can do anything interesting. There's absolutely nothing epic about wandering the world for hours, searching out giant rats to kill with a rusty dagger because you aren't yet strong enough to wield a real sword.

Still, those patient enough to get over the initial difficulties will find a lot of game for their buck. Too bad it all starts so frustratingly and uninterestingly.

_Di Luo

PUB	ATARI	PRICE	$39.99
DEV	PIRANHA BYTES	PLAYERS	1
REL	AVAILABLE NOW	ORIGIN	GERMANY

GMR CRUEL WORLD 7/10

NOT AS GOOD AS: KOTOR
BETTER THAN: MIGHT AND MAGIC
WAIT FOR IT: NEVERWINTER NIGHTS: HORDES OF THE UNDERDARK

DUNGEON SIEGE: LOA

RPG-LITE

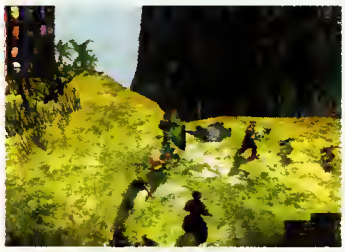
TEEN | PC

If you enjoyed *Star Wars Episode II* for its midriff shots and other such eye candy, you'll love *Legends of Aranna*. This RPG is full of lush graphics and beautiful effects but completely devoid of a decent story, character development, and anything resembling depth.

LOA is an add-on to *Dungeon Siege* that includes a new 15-hour campaign, some new features (like a fighting pack animal), and new treasures and spells. Sadly, the game plays the same: blandly. You move your party around the map, activate monsters' reaction radii, then watch them fight your guys. It's like playing an RTS, except you have only one group of units to manage. There's very little strategy involved and so little actual "role playing" that you won't feel attached to your generic party of fighters, rangers, and mages.

LOA should get points for value, since it includes the original game for the price of a typical expansion pack, but there's nothing here for anyone but diehard loyalists of the original *Dungeon Siege*.

_Di Luo



PUB MICROSOFT | PRICE $27.99
DEV GAS POWERED GAMES | PLAYERS 1-4
REL RELEASED | ORIGIN U.S.A

GMR LACKING 6/10

NOT AS GOOD AS: DIABLO 2
BETTER THAN: LIONHEART
WAIT FOR IT: NWN HORDES OF THE UNDERDARK

CONTRACT J.A.C.K.

SHOOT FIRST, SHOOT AGAIN LATER

MATURE | PC

***Contract J.A.C.K.* is the inferior prequel to the outstanding *No One Lives Forever* series, having none of the charm, humor, or creative gameplay of the other games under the *NOLF* umbrella. Instead, it's a straight shooter with no sneaking, no cool gadgets, and only a smattering of the series' trademark humor.**

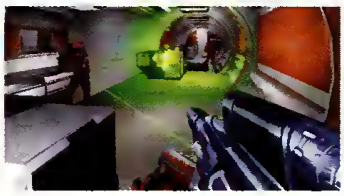
This kind of game could have worked in the *NOLF* universe, except that to pad out the playing time, the designers made a bunch of repetitive levels that don't even evoke the series' 1960s setting. *Contract J.A.C.K.* is a competent, if charmless, shooter that should satisfy gamers with simple cravings. But even then, probably not so much.

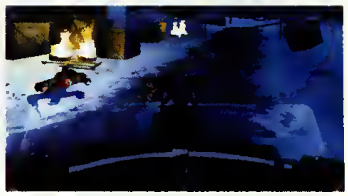
_Tom Price

PUB VIVENDI UNIVERSAL | PRICE $49.99
DEV MONOLITH | PLAYERS 1
REL AVAILABLE NOW | ORIGIN U.S.A.

GMR JACKED 5/10

BETTER THAN: POSTAL 2
NOT AS GOOD AS: NO ONE LIVES FOREVER 2
WAIT FOR IT: EVIL GENIUS





PLANETSIDE: CORE COMBAT

PLANETSIDE GOES UNDERGROUND

TEEN | PC

***PlanetSide* is Sony Online's response to the incredible success of *EverQuest*; but for twitch gamers. It's a massively multiplayer online first-person shooter where three factions wage endless, pointless, but addictive war.**

The *Core Combat* expansion adds subterranean warfare to the mix, so you can duke it out in underground caverns and complexes. Enticing you to pack your spelunking gear are brand-new weapons and facility-benefit modules, which allow you to grant your friendly bases helpful modifiers, such as shields and new vehicles, although only the Flail mobile artillery sees any real action.

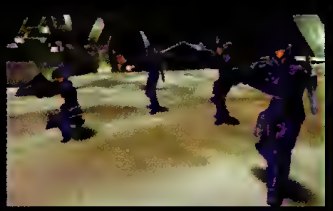
But exploring the core can get boring quite quickly, since most of the players are fighting topside, where the action is. Anyway, it's far more entertaining to sneak into an enemy base and steal their modules than to trek down to the core. And even if you don't have the expansion pack installed, you can still benefit from the modules that your factionmates successfully nab. If you're a fan of firefights, *Core Combat* gives you access to the complete *PlanetSide* experience, but if you've already got the original, the expansion isn't really necessary.

_Gerald Villoria

PUB SONY ONLINE | PRICE $29.99
DEV SONY ONLINE | PLAYERS 1 (MMO)
REL AVAILABLE NOW | ORIGIN U.S.A.

GMR UNDERSIDED 6/10

BETTER THAN: QUAKE ON YOUR PENTIUM 133
NOT AS GOOD AS: BATTLEFIELD 1942
WAIT FOR IT: HALF-LIFE 2 MULTIPLAYER MODS



RAILROAD TYCOON 3

FUN WITH YOUR CHOO-CHOO

EVERYONE | PC

***Railroad Tycoon 3* is a great strategy game that spans from the birth of railroads to an imaginative future. It includes plenty of gameplay, with over a dozen campaigns scattered throughout the world, a sandbox mode, and even several minigames.**

Except for a few interface problems with laying tracks and train management (especially if you have a lot of trains), *Railroad Tycoon 3* is deep but easy to play. Each scenario plays very differently: Some require aggressive track laying and overspending, while others reward caution and good business sense. There are even opportunities for cutthroat capitalism, including hostile takeovers.

Few business games currently on the market are as enjoyable as this one. If you like business simulations and have even a passing interest in trains, you should definitely check this game out.

_Di Luo

PUB GATHERING | PRICE $49.99
DEV POPTOP | PLAYERS 1-6
REL RELEASED | ORIGIN U.S.A

GMR WHOOOOOOOOOOOO! 8/10

NOT AS GOOD AS: CAPITALISM 2
BETTER THAN: MALL TYCOON
WAIT FOR IT: MICROSOFT TRAIN SIMULATOR 2

BROKEN SWORD: TSD
HOT PARIS KNIGHTS

TEEN | PC

For the third chapter in the *Broken Sword* series, Revolution Games has abandoned the hand-drawn animation of earlier games and put an emphasis on action-oriented puzzles. The result is the best PC adventure game in years.

The Sleeping Dragon doesn't require any familiarity with previous *Broken Sword* games (or *Circle of Blood*, as the first game was called in the U.S.). Though newcomers might miss a few in-jokes, the game does a good job of bringing players up to speed without being pedantic about it. *Sleeping Dragon* features George Stobbart, a wise-cracking American lawyer, and Nicole Collard, a French journalist with *Final Fantasy* hair, as they attempt to thwart the vestiges of the nefarious Knights Templar.

The newfound emphasis on action is both a blessing and a curse. This isn't an action game, and simulating jumping puzzles with an adventure-game interface is enjoyable, but risk free and ultimately pointless. But the animation makes all the cliff hanging and pit jumping even better—this is a great-looking game. Unfortunately, the overabundance of crate-pushing puzzles, no matter how clever they may be, is the game's second biggest problem, overshadowed only by the frustrating timed sequences that you must play repeatedly to get past.

That the game manages to overcome these two problems is a testament to its otherwise excellent design. With great dialogue, beautiful art direction, and generally high-quality puzzles, it's worthwhile to indulge the designers' crate fetish just to see what comes next. ◀

_Ron Dulin

PUB	REVOLUTION GAMES	PRICE	$39.99
DEV	DREAMCATCHER	PLAYERS	1
REL	AVAILABLE NOW	ORIGIN	U.K.

GMR 9/10 IF IT AIN'T BROKE

BETTER THAN: BROKEN SWORD 2
NOT AS GOOD AS: THE LONGEST JOURNEY
WAIT FOR IT: THE LONGEST JOURNEY: STATIC

LORDS OF EVERQUEST
CLONE WARCRAFT

TEEN | PC

Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, or so the adage goes. Let's be perfectly clear about this right off the bat: *Lords of EverQuest* is *Warcraft III* in the *EverQuest* setting. So if you've played *Warcraft III* and its ilk, you can expect a thoroughly similar experience.

Real-time strategy games—this one included—espouse three central concepts: harvest resources, build an army, and smash everyone else's armies. *Lords of EverQuest* simplifies the first step somewhat by paring down the resource gathering to a single supply: platinum. This reduces some of the typical RTS economic micromanagement, allowing you to spend more time guiding your armies.

Speaking of armies, the game boasts three playable factions: the Dawn Brotherhood (your typical human/dwarf fantasy army fare), the Elddar Alliance (elves and other tree-hugging folk), and the Shadowrealm (all manner of dark warriors and necromancers). Each faction also has five Lords to choose from, each one has a unique array of special powers that become available as the character earns experience.

The gaining of experience extends to the rest of your army as well; your troops earn experience independently through combat, and you can eventually knight up to two units, beefing them up considerably and giving them access to extra powers.

Combat unfolds predictably: Superior micromanagement and army composition are the deciding factors in large-scale battles. Typical winning tactics include anticipating your foe's building strategy, scouting out his base, and staying on the offensive.

Lords of EverQuest is ultimately a *Warcraft III* clone with some scaled-back micromanagement and a different set of window dressings. It looks the same, it sounds the same, and its ubiquitous triad of single-player campaigns pretty much plays the same. Diehard *EQ* addicts and RTS junkies will get some fun out of this game (especially with its monstrous 12-player LAN/Internet support); everyone else should probably just stick to *Warcraft III*. ◀

_Ryan Scott

PUB	SONY ONLINE	PRICE	$49.99
DEV	RAPID EYE ENTERTAINMENT	PLAYERS	1-12
REL	DECEMBER 2003	ORIGIN	U.S.A.

GMR 5/10 MIDDLING

BETTER THAN: EVERQUEST ONLINE ADVENTURES
NOT AS GOOD AS: WARCRAFT III
WAIT FOR IT: EVERQUEST II

PC

MANHUNT
SEVENTH HEAVEN
MATURE | PS2

Manhunt's flagrant excesses—its gleefully gruesome executions, particularly—have been, by now, well documented. Lovingly laced with profanity, drug speak, mayhem, and mutilation, it's technically solid, with an agile camera and stylish presentation supporting this interactive snuff film's twisted theme: maim or be maimed.

When it comes to the grittiness that's all the rage these days, *Manhunt* takes the cake. Rockstar North has done what it set out to do by creating a hellishly harrowing experience that's too claustrophobic for comfort. As convicted murderer James Earl Cash, the player is tasked with saving his skin from an army of thugs, skinheads, and survivalists—the sort of lowlife, in fact, that will undoubtedly eat *Manhunt*'s grim gameplay right up.

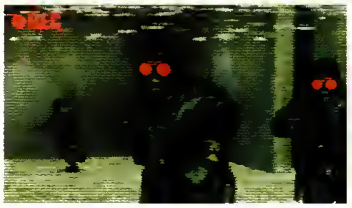
Ultimately, however, *Manhunt* becomes more laborious than shocking. Along the way, the vaunted enemy A.I. turns transparent, detracting considerably from its aura of paranoia. The explicit executions, while still repulsive, eventually become little more than a nuisance—the fact that they can't be skipped makes this just the thing for masochists and sadists alike.

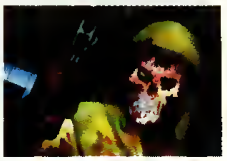
_David Chen

PUB ROCKSTAR GAMES
DEV ROCKSTAR NORTH
REL AVAILABLE NOW
PRICE $49.99
PLAYERS 1
ORIGIN SCOTLAND

GMR TASTELESS 6/10

BETTER THAN: THE GRINCH
NOT AS GOOD AS METAL GEAR SOLID 2 SOL
WAIT FOR IT: FIGHT CLUB, THE GAME (NO, REALLY)





PS2

MAXIMO VS. ARMY OF ZIN
KNIVES OUT
TEEN | PS2

While there's little in _Army of Zin_ that will amaze or astound you, this refreshingly linear adventure is a handsomely crafted, better-looking, better-playing, more-balanced follow-up to 2002's _Maximo_.

As before, this is an extruded homage to the 2D side-scrollers of yesteryear, featuring a classic mixture of running, jumping, and smashing at the expense of the mechanized Army of Zin. It runs smoothly, plays great, and flat-out just feels right. Any quibbles we might have had about the first game have been addressed: The camera's been finessed so that death—when it comes—comes "fairly", while combat has been tuned to keep it fresh and lively throughout.

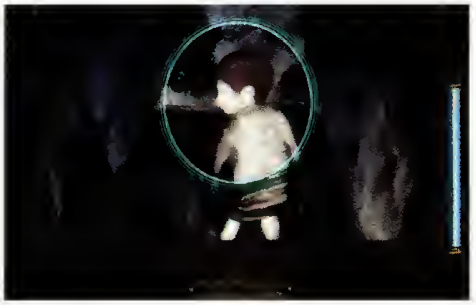
Zin's graphics aren't exactly jaw dropping, but its anime aesthetics look and feel like a game from the East, right down to the smooth CG cut-scenes and lackluster story and voiceovers. But what really distinguishes this charmer is its finely honed sense of pacing: While the first game's notorious difficulty level is fully intact, the levels, objectives, and boss battles are mixed and matched to near perfection. All of which makes for an unpretentious and enjoyable experiment in retooling the past.

_David Chen

PUB CAPCOM
DEV CAPCOM DIGITAL STUDIOS
REL AVAILABLE NOW
PRICE $49.99
PLAYERS 1
ORIGIN U.S.A.

GMR MAXIMAL 8/10

BETTER THAN: MAXIMO
WORSE THAN: RATCHET & CLANK 2
WAIT FOR IT: PSYCHONAUTS



← If there's one thing we hate, it's dead ghost babies (below) running around, screwing up our $#%*! Oh, and if you see the ghost in the screenshot above, check your photo log and tell us what it says. Write!

PS2

FATAL FRAME 2

SMILE FOR THE CAMERA, DEAD PERSON!

MATURE | PS2

PUBLISHER: TECMO
DEVELOPER: PROJECT ZERO
RELEASE: AVAILABLE NOW
PRICE: $49.99
PLAYERS: 1
ORIGIN: JAPAN

Tecmo is known for raising monsters and having chicks slap each other around, not for turning mostly mentally stable gamers into paranoid little girls. The *Fatal Frame* series manages exactly that, however, and its new sequel, *Crimson Butterfly*, is as terrifying as its predecessor.

Mio Amakura and her twin, Mayu, never thought an innocent walk through the woods would lead them to a hidden town with a twisted secret. The sisters unknowingly wander into All God's Village and soon become the unwilling participants in a reenactment of the Crimson Sacrifice. Shrouded in darkness and surrounded by evil, the sisters are in for their worst nightmare.

Resident Evil relies on shock scares; *Silent Hill* uses freaky imagery. *Fatal Frame* relies on something in the middle. Tecmo created an atmosphere that doesn't let up, one that has the player dreading each new step. Ghosts moan around corners, ghastly children laugh in the distance, and every so often a poltergeist decides it wants a piece of you. The scares become less surprising as the game presses on, but you're still guaranteed plenty of shrieks.

The camera obscura remains your only weapon of defense, and though new abilities and functions are present, you're still slaying ghosts with pictures. Combat is sometimes frustrating due to awkward camera angles and Mio's slow movement in camera mode, but the ghosts are usually pretty sluggish, too. Series veterans will be happy knowing there are links to the original, but only the best ending ties in directly. There are also new costumes, a mission mode, and other extras to be unlocked.

If you enter All God's Village, enter with a spare pair of underwear. I❤

_Patrick Klepek

GMR SCARED STRAIGHT **8**/10

BETTER THAN SILENT HILL 3
ON PAR WITH FATAL FRAME
WAIT FOR IT: RESIDENT EVIL 4

2ND OPINION

When I first played a near-final version of this game, it was in a room full of grown men who, each time something scary happened, screamed like 5-year-old girls just like me. When I took the final version home to review, I realized that I just didn't have the balls to play it alone. Thank God for freelancers I❤

_James Mielke

MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE—OPERATION SURMA
CAMERA: INTOLERABLE

TEEN | GC | PS2 | XB

For the second licensed game in a row, Paradigm has forgotten the second most important rule of game development (just before "don't call your game *RTX: Red Rock*"): Make sure the player can see what the heck is going on. *Operation Surma*'s camera is a hateful creation, demanding more attention than a sugar-buzzed toddler and never showing you what you need to see, including anyone who might be shooting holes in your stomach.

Maybe the camera-sitting is meant to distract from the glitchy 3D engine, the atrocious hand-to-hand combat, or the fact that *Surma* steals various gameplay aspects from *Splinter Cell* and *Metal Gear Solid* without improving upon any of them; it's a virtual parade of stealth-action been there, done that. *Surma*'s one good thing is the voice-acting performance of Ving Rhames, who reprises his role from the dormant *M:I* movie franchise—but why not save yourself 50 bucks and savor his RadioShack commercials instead? ▮◀

_Zach Meston

PUB	ATARI	PRICE	$49.99
DEV	PARADIGM ENTERTAINMENT	PLAYERS	1
REL	AVAILABLE NOW	ORIGIN	U.S.A.

GMR SELF-DESTRUCT 4/10

BETTER THAN ROGUE OPS
NOT AS GOOD AS MANHUNT
WAIT FOR IT: METAL GEAR SOLID 3

MAX PAYNE 2: THE FALL OF MAX PAYNE
PLAY IT AGAIN, MAX

MATURE | XB

So then, how does one review a game for a second time on a different platform? Perhaps by listing the differences between the versions.

OK, that's easy...um, actually, both versions of Rockstar's cops 'n' robbers caper are pretty much dead ringers for one another. In fact, the only thing that makes the Xbox version different from the PC game is the use of a gamepad to control your character, which does seem slightly more appropriate for a third-person shooter.

The PS2 version's graphics don't quite match up to those on Xbox or PC, but what else is new? Yep, *Max Payne 2* is a gritty, stylish noir sequel built to please the first game's many trigger-happy fans—regardless of whatever system they're playing it on. ▮◀

_Tom Price

PUB	ROCKSTAR GAMES	PRICE	$49.99
DEV	REMEDY ENTERTAINMENT	PLAYERS	1
REL	AVAILABLE NOW	ORIGIN	FINLAND

GMR PAYNELESS 7/10

BETTER THAN: MAX PAYNE
MORE FUN THAN: SHOOTING FISH IN A BARREL
WAIT FOR IT: MAFIA

MAXIMUM CHASE
MINIMUM EFFORT

TEEN | XB

These chases go as high as 11—or so developer Genki would have you believe. In truth, hyperbole doesn't become the inaccurately named *Maximum Chase*.

The game presents frantic driving challenges, some in which players must drive, others in which they must shoot. It's competently done, but fairly dull. Players drive on linear courses with enemies who are easily nudged into oblivion, then shoot on scripted courses with enemies who can be blown to bits before they become threats. All of which is topped by a huge boss fight. Whoopee. ▮◀

_Greg Orlando

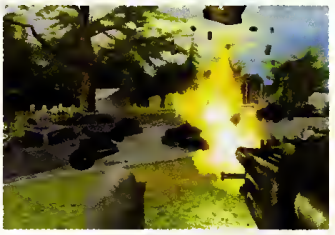
PUB	MAJESCO	PRICE	$49.99
DEV	GENKI	PLAYERS	1
REL	AVAILABLE NOW	ORIGIN	JAPAN

GMR MAXED-OUT 6/10

BETTER THAN ROADKILL
NOT AS GOOD AS WRECKLESS
ALSO TRY: SPY HUNTER 2

T3: RISE OF THE MACHINES
TERMINABLE

TEEN | XB [REVIEWED] | PS2 | PC



If California's new governator has a shred of common sense, he'll order a recall of *Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines* for Xbox, PC, and PlayStation 2. Here, developer Black Ops shoehorns the powerful *Terminator* license into a clunky, by-the-numbers first-person shooter.

A crappy lock-on system snaps the Terminator's weapon right to a target, oftentimes one that's right underneath a grate and thus untouchable, all the while ignoring a more obvious threat. Throw in some uninspired third-person brawling, and, well, this turkey comes out as dry as the Sahara. ▮◀

_Greg Orlando

PUB	ATARI	PRICE	$29.99
DEV	BLACK OPS	PLAYERS	1
REL	AVAILABLE NOW	ORIGIN	U.S.A.

GMR TERMINATED 4/10

BETTER THAN: RED FACTION 2
NOT AS GOOD AS: MAX PAYNE 2: THE FALL OF MP
WAIT FOR IT: HALO 2

SPYHUNTER 2
I SPY...ROADKILL

EVERYONE | PS2 | XB

If you play the *SpyHunter* update from two years ago and then this sequel, you'll be left with one question: What happened? What should have been a triumph from the makers of *Midnight Club* and *Smuggler's Run* is surprisingly short (with just 16 brisk missions), brutal (with no checkpoints or continues and precious few power-ups), and ugly (especially on PS2).

Adding to the pain are the annoying escort and defense missions, the meaningless story line, and throwaway two-player modes. This is the rare sequel that gets it all wrong. ▮◀

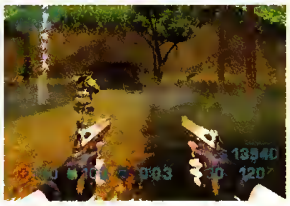
_Zach Meston

PUB	MIDWAY	PRICE	$49.99
DEV	ANGEL STUDIOS	PLAYERS	1-2
REL	AVAILABLE NOW	ORIGIN	U.S.A.

GMR E-BRAKE 4/10

BETTER THAN: CRASH NITRO KART
NOT AS GOOD AS: MIDWAY ARCADE CLASSICS
WAIT FOR IT: SPY VS. SPY HUNTER

XB
PC
PS2
GC



← Classic maps such as Italy and Dust are essential to the game and have fortunately been included. They've been nicely upgraded with some new textures, too. But some other classics are sorely missed, like Office, and what Valve did to Militia (creating new routes) changes that map irreparably. Let's hope some of these make a comeback as Xbox Live downloads.

COUNTER-STRIKE

LOCKED BUT NOT LOADED

MATURE | XB

PUBLISHER MICROSOFT
DEVELOPER VALVE SOFTWARE
PRICE: $49.99
RELEASE AVAILABLE NOW
PLAYERS: 1-16 ON XBOX LIVE
ORIGIN: U.S.A.

Counter-Strike's history is one of videogaming's Cinderella stories. From its humble beginnings as a user-created _Half-Life_ mod to its emergence as a full-fledged online gaming phenomenon, _Counter-Strike_ has accounted for more wasted work productivity and homework avoidance than Friendster.

And while it has lost some ground to _Battlefield 1942_—the online slugfest du jour—one could find upwards of 30,000 players playing at once at its peak. It's easy to see why Microsoft would want to port the game to Xbox in order to help drive subscriptions to Xbox Live, its online service.

But while the final product is faithful in both spirit and content to the original PC title and completely functional over the Internet as well as in single-player mode, there aren't many compelling reasons to pick up this version.

The single-player mode is nothing more than matches against bots that range from godlike to functionally retarded. Control is well done but inferior to the mouse/keyboard setup. And while some of the more classic maps are included, some key ones are missing, and the new maps are somewhat uninspired.

If you're a fan of the PC version, there's simply no reason to switch over and start paying for Xbox Live. If you're a tactical-shooter fan playing on Xbox and are absolutely dying to unload a full MP5 clip into your friend across the country, you're probably going to be much more satisfied with _Rainbow Six 3_.

Counter-Strike on Xbox should have been the next glorious chapter in that game's story. Instead, it's a mildly disappointing epilogue.

_ Tom Price

GMR BENEATH THE COUNTER **6/10**

BETTER THAN: BRUTE FORCE
NOT AS GOOD AS: RAINBOW SIX 3
WAIT FOR IT: COUNTER-STRIKE: CONDITION ZERO

2ND. OPINION

Counter-Strike on PC (despite the endless patch updates and mirror-site downloads from Belgium) is a time-eating bastard that is as addictive a multiplayer game as they come. The Xbox version is a shadow of its former self, with needless tweaks to popular maps and oversaturated graphics that repulse.

_James Mielke

LUPIN THE 3RD
METAL GEAR SLAPSTICK

TEEN | PS2

The stealth-action category desperately needs a hero who doesn't take himself so seriously. Unlike the Botox-faced Sam Fisher and Solid Snake, our eponymous hero—a 35-year-old anime superstar—dares to smile, laugh, cry, and otherwise charm you with his goofy demeanor.

Lupin the 3rd's stealth gameplay is rudimentary stuff; our hero can't peek around corners, hide in shadows, or pile up dead bodies like cordwood. But the game makes up for these missing elements with unique mechanics of its own, such as our hero's frequent use of cheesy disguises and propensity for pickpocketing, the latter of which is the game's simplest and most addictive pleasure. *Lupin* even includes a number of *Resident Evil*-ish puzzles, often crossing the line between stealth-action and action-adventure. It's just a shame the adventure only lasts for five levels.

From a graphics-whore perspective, *Lupin* is painful; the 3D engine was dated when the game shipped in Japan a year ago, and the bare environments and jaggy textures have aged with all the grace of Cher. What's important, of course, is that *Lupin* does a fantastic job of capturing the flavor of the anime. The gangly cast of characters is lovingly re-created in polygonal form, the American voice-acting cast supplies a superb dub, and the jazzy soundtrack might as well be a series of cues from the series.

With its comedic bent and offbeat gameplay, *Lupin the 3rd* is a blessed alternative to the current wave of *Splinter Cell* clones, and a game that stealth fans and *Lupin* geeks can dig on equally. **_Zach Meston**

PUB BANDAI — PRICE $39.99
DEV BAMPRESTO — PLAYERS 1
REL FEBRUARY — ORIGIN JAPAN

GMR 7/10 CLIFF HANGIN'

BETTER THAN: MISSION IMPOSSIBLE: OP SURMA
NOT AS GOOD AS: KILL.SWITCH
WAIT FOR IT: ALIAS

THE HAUNTED MANSION
EERILY GOOD

EVERYONE | XB (REVIEWED) | PS2 | GC

XB
PS2
GC

Historians will look back on TDK's *The Haunted Mansion* and proclaim it the best third-person action videogame ever based on a Walt Disney World amusement park attraction that inspired an Eddie Murphy action comedy. And they will be right.

As Ezekiel Holloway, geek and hapless caretaker, players get to take the role of ghostbuster, ridding a haunted mansion of its foul presence. Each room in the mansion must be lit before Holloway can begin to capture its ghosts, and a puzzle stands in the way of our hero and the light switch. Rendered in grays, browns, and muted whites, *Mansion*'s about as beautiful as it is original; sharp-eyed players will note the eerie similarities to Nintendo's spectral vacuuming epic *Luigi's Mansion*.

Mansion finishes strong in the pageant not on the strength of its looks, but rather because of its sterling charm and personality. The game expertly blends physical—mostly platforming—challenges with cerebral puzzles and, in the process, keeps players guessing throughout. One room shrinks Holloway to the size of a pool ball and forces him to engage in a deadly game of billiards. In another, a series of mirrors must be shifted to illuminate the room.

Each room stands as a delightful blank slate and the great fun comes not only in defeating a room's ghouls (banshees, gargoyles, skeletons, etc.) with an enchanted lantern or even solving its riddle, but also from deciphering its mechanics. Before players can set about completing their task they must first figure out what the task is, and the simple joy brought about by discovering a room's raison d'etre or gimmick is like the proverbial cold drink on a very hot day. **_Greg Orlando**

PUB TDK MEDIACTIVE — PRICE $39.99
DEV HIGH VOLTAGE SOFTWARE — PLAYERS 1
REL AVAILABLE NOW — ORIGIN U.S.A.

GMR 7/10 SCAWY!

BETTER THAN: LUIGI'S MANSION
WORSE THAN: DISNEY'S EXTREME SKATE CHALLENGE
WAIT FOR IT: SCOOBY-DOO MYSTERY MAYHEM

RPG MAKER II
A RATHER PAINFUL GAME

EVERYONE | PS2

Making a game is never going to be an easy undertaking, as any fool who dips a toe into *RPG Maker II* without carefully laid plans will discover. A piece of software (it's not a game, really) like this, though, does at least provide the layman with the requisite tools without forcing him or her to spend years fiddling with data structures and input buffering. But everything *RPG Maker II* gives with its right hand, it takes away with its left.

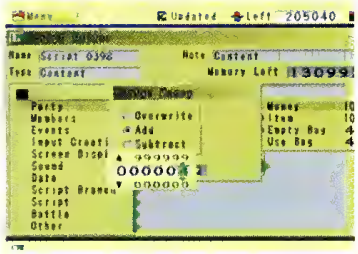
The main problem is that this is not software that ever really wanted to exist on PS2. Without a hard drive to give budding designers their full desired scope, it loses something, and without a proper GUI interface, it loses still more. The fact that you can use a USB keyboard in this version is a major improvement over the PS1 original, but it's still not quite enough.

Another major stumbling block is the lack of accessibility: The manual can only cover so much, and it's not cross-referenced the way it needs to be. Worse, the included game here, *Fu-Ma*, is immeasurably worse than its predecessor's, *Gobli's Quest*, which proved entertaining while still managing to teach the ropes of RPG design. *Fu-Ma*, though, is both useless and boring. Its blurry graphics and awkward control (in an RPG?!) provide a sickening surety that no matter how much time you spend in design, the final result won't be worth playing. **_Zach Meston**

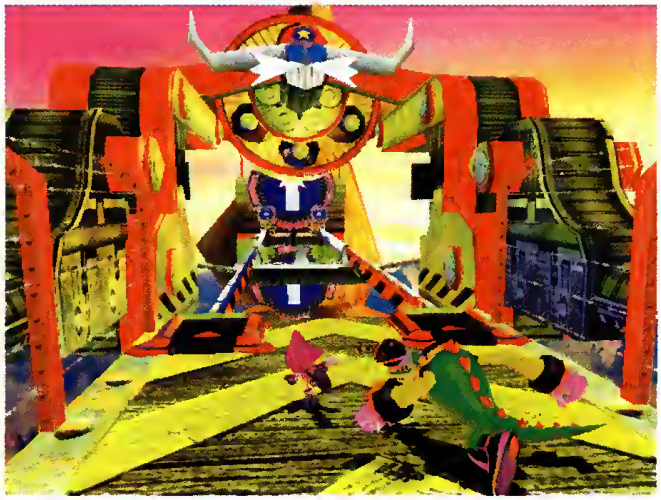
PUB ASCII — PRICE $49.99
DEV ENTERBRAIN — PLAYERS 1
REL AVAILABLE NOW — ORIGIN JAPAN

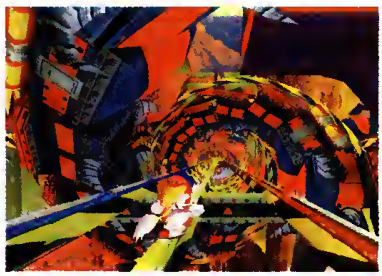
GMR 4/10 OBTUSE

BETTER THAN: RPG MAKER
NOT AS GOOD AS: NEVERWINTER NIGHTS
MAKES US WISH FOR: RPG MAKER...ON THE PC



← Team Rose, Team Sonic, and Team Dark present the same quest with varying difficulty—Team Rose is for newbies, Team Dark is for experts. Team Chaotix reworks the stages with nonlinear goals, but the result is usually more tedious than fun.





XB
PS2
GC

SONIC HEROES

LOVE AND HATE AT SONIC SPEED

EVERYONE | GC [REVIEWED] | PS2 | XB

PUBLISHER: SEGA
DEVELOPER: SONIC TEAM
PRICE: $39.99
RELEASE: AVAILABLE NOW
PLAYERS: 1-4
ORIGIN: JAPAN

The major design successes in *Sonic Heroes* almost manage to cover up the fundamental design flaws. Almost, but not quite. The glorious 3D speed rush is still broken by moments where you will scream with rage inspired by whatever sadism or idiocy has kept Sonic Team from fixing its camera and control schemes after five years of 3D *Sonic* games.

Almost six years, even. Why, after that long, is Sonic Team still unable to reconcile subjective 3D controls with an automatic camera? Why must we guess at how to negotiate a looping track and then charge over the high side as punishment for guessing wrong? Why should finished levels still contain bizarre collision bugs? And why should the PS2 version be so technically backward? The GC and Xbox versions are essentially perfect, but the game struggles to make 30 frames per second on PS2.

Sonic Heroes, in other words, will probably piss you off in the same way that every other 3D *Sonic* has. It's a matter of degree, though—*Heroes* backs off from the hate-inspiring precipice of *Sonic Adventure 2* and back into the tolerable *Sonic Adventure* range of the hate spectrum. And when it isn't hateful, it is absolutely beautiful. It starts slowly, teaching you how the team gameplay works, but once it takes off, it soars to amazing heights. The Casino Park and Bingo Highway levels realize all the promise of a 3D *Sonic*—fast, flashy, and fun—and the three-character gimmick presents constantly shifting challenges.

It comes down to a question of tolerance. If you can take a little hate mixed in with your love, you'll love *Sonic Heroes*. Which is to say, when you're not hating it, anyway.

_Dave Smith

GMR MEAN BEAN MACHINE **7/10**

BETTER THAN: SONIC ADVENTURE 2
NOT AS GOOD AS: WHAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN
ALSO TRY: BILLY HATCHER AND THE GIANT EGG

2ND OPINION

Sonic Heroes, despite the impression that it's back to the speedy *Sonic* we once knew, is actually a more methodical, deliberate platformer, and once you come to grips with this, the game becomes much more enjoyable than you'd think. I'm still waiting for a *Sonic* game without all his pals, though.

_James Mielke

WRATH UNLEASHED

NO MORE BATTLES BY THE NUMBERS

TEEN | XB [REVIEWED] | PS2

If the *Street Fighter* and *Advance Wars* series had a child, it might resemble *Wrath Unleashed*, a fun light-strategy game with real-time 1-on-1 battles. The perfect hybrid would have fighting and strategy components so deep that either could win addicts in the other's absence.

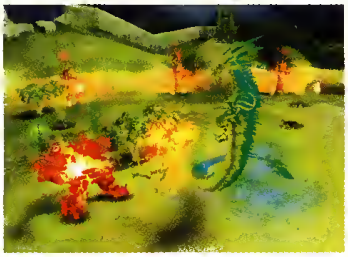
Wrath Unleashed comes surprisingly close. Turn off the fighting and its turn-based hexagonal strategy portions are in some cases better than chess, with many different maps, magic spells, and up to four-player simultaneous play. A player's army of fantasy characters varies from pawn-class unicorns to king-class demigods, each differing in movement and strengths. Games are won by seizing certain map locations—typically temples—or vanquishing an opposing demigod. And a decent story mode lets players unlock each demigod's superpowerful god form.

Whenever two soldiers occupy the same space, *Wrath Unleashed* loads its real-time fighting engine: deadly environments with *War Gods*-style button-mashing. Life bars carry over between battles, so repeated centaur attacks eventually wear down mighty dragons. The hand-to-hand combat and magical projectile exchanges are solid, but not *Street Fighter*-caliber, so though there's a fighting-only mode, most players will play the strategy and fighting parts together.

The Collective's visual design work is so impressive that the game nearly rates better than the sum of its parts. Character designs, animations, backgrounds, and camera movements are universally superb, creating a beautiful and coherent fantasy universe from different cultures' mythologies. And epic music amply reinforces the game's titanic clashes.

Wrath's only problems are small but important: Loading unfortunately breaks up the game's pacing, the fighting engine could be deeper, and there's no online mode. We sincerely hope these issues are addressed in a sequel, because a game this solid truly deserves one.

_Jeremy Horwitz



PUB LUCASARTS | PRICE $49.99
DEV THE COLLECTIVE | PLAYERS 1-4
REL FEBRUARY | ORIGIN U.S.A.

GMR MEMORABLE 8/10

BETTER THAN: ARCHON & BATTLE CHESS COMBINED
JUST AS GOOD AS: ADVANCE WARS
WAIT FOR IT: A STREET FIGHTER RPG?

R: RACING EVOLUTION

DON'T KEEP IT REAL

EVERYONE | XB [REVIEWED] | GC | PS2

It's difficult to shoo away the ghosts of *Ridge Racer* while keeping an open mind about Namco's newest racer franchise. *R: Racing Evolution*, even by sake of its name, suggests that it is indeed the new face of the long-loved *Ridge* series, as many of the hallmarks are here: sharp visuals, thumping electronic beats, impeccable front-end design, and, of course, cute Japanese girls with short haircuts and jumpsuits one size too small.

But for some reason that continues to elude us, Namco decided to make a racing game that's much more realistic than any they've previously done. In certain instances, when things become more real, they become less fun. So it is with *R: Racing Evolution*, a feature-light driving simulator that neither offends nor excels in any particular area of design, and one that doesn't elicit a sense of excitement, rather a feeling of déjà vu.

The primary problem is the limited track selection: six concrete tracks, three rally courses (five if you count their reversed counterparts), a mini course, and one drag strip. And perhaps aside from Circuit De Monaco and the Rally Arena, none are particularly memorable experiences. The rally tracks help break up the monotony but eventually turn stale (the inanimate cardboard stands posing as enthusiastic spectators certainly don't help, either).

Upon completion of the game's 14-chapter story mode—which serves as a short yet entertaining tour of the game—all that remains is successfully finishing the numerous Event Challenges and filling up your garage. Activities you've already spent so many long hours doing in other games in this competitive genre.

Ultimately, we have to question the accuracy of the *Evolution* label. Since the driving force of evolutionary theory is "survival of the fittest," we struggle to think of anything deficient about the pure arcade thrills of *Ridge Racer*. It's important to stress that we're not slighting *R: Racing Evolution* for being different than what we may have wanted, we're slighting it for being a less realistic racing game than what we already have.

_Andrew Pfister

PUB NAMCO | PRICE $49.99
DEV NAMCO | PLAYERS 1-2
REL AVAILABLE NOW | ORIGIN JAPAN

GMR HIT THE SKIDS 6/10

BETTER THAN: AUTO MODELLISTA
NOT AS GOOD AS: PROJECT GOTHAM RACING 2
WAIT FOR IT: GRAN TURISMO 4

LOWRIDER
NEITHER FAST, NOR FURIOUS

EVERYONE | PS2

Lowrider attempts to use the urban automotive subculture as a backdrop for a rhythm-action game; the results are both embarrassing and unplayable.

You take your ride into various cities, cruise the strip, and enter competitions in which you must literally outdance a rival car. Success will get you fans and prize money, which you can use for upgrades or cheesy airbrushed decals of strippers.

Lowrider has perhaps the lowest production values of any game on the market today. The presentation is decidedly bare-bones, and the graphics are first generation. Music seems to be lifted from an old 16-bit title, and the Engrish-speaking announcer loses any appeal after you hear his one line for the 50th time.

All would be forgivable if the core gameplay—which consists of pressing one button over and over—were decent. There's no sense of rhythm, and results feel arbitrary at best. *Lowrider* was a golden opportunity to perhaps create a new subgenre in gaming, but the developers blew their shot.

_Matthew Hawkins

PUB JALECO ENTERTAINMENT | PRICE $39.99
DEV JALECO ENTERTAINMENT | PLAYERS 1-2
REL AVAILABLE NOW | ORIGIN JAPAN

GMR BUSTED RIDE 2/10

BETTER THAN: DRIVEN
NOT AS GOOD AS: NEED FOR SPEED UNDERGROUND
WAIT FOR IT: THE FAST AND THE FURIOUS

GUNDAM: ENCOUNTERS IN SPACE
ROBOTS ON RAILS

TEEN | PS2

Part outer-space shoot-em-up, part anime-clip delivery vehicle, *Encounters in Space* contains more *Gundam* fanservice than should be allowed by law, with 70 unlockable Mobile Suits (most of them usable only in two-player combat, alas) and 80 minutes of cartoon excerpts.

The almost-too-speedy gameplay alternates between *Panzer Dragoon*-ish on-rails and free-roaming segments, the latter made difficult by confusing and sluggish controls. *Encounters in Space* makes up for its inevitably repetitive lock/dodge/shoot action with tons of replay value: the one-player campaign is supplemented by a host of secondary missions, an original side-story mode, and an intriguing setup in which you build a customized pilot (to use in versus mode) by fighting random skirmishes. A decent shooter, but a brilliant tie-in.

_Zach Meston

PUB BANDAI | PRICE $39.99
DEV SUNRISE | PLAYERS 1-2
REL DECEMBER 2003 | ORIGIN U.S.A.

GMR GUN-DAMN! 7/10

BETTER THAN: MOBILE SUIT GUNDAM: JTJ
NOT AS GOOD AS: MOBILE SUIT GUNDAM: F VS. Z
WAIT FOR IT: SD GUNDAM FORCE

BLOWOUT
IN SPACE, NO ONE CAN HEAR YOU YAWN

TEEN | PS2 (REVIEWED) | XB

Fans of *Contra* and other side-scrolling twitchfests know that their kind of game is few and far between. *BlowOut* may seem like a worthy investment, especially at the cheaper-than-cheap price of 10 dollars. But those expecting a simple *Contra* rip-off will be a bit surprised—even disappointed—since *BlowOut* could have taken more cues from Konami's seminal shooter.

It's you in a massive space station versus hordes of aliens. Sounds great, but the critters are all too goofy looking to be taken seriously. Levels are huge, almost to a fault. Since each section of the station is completely identical to the others, it's easy to lose track of your position. Plus, the amount of backtracking is beyond excessive.

Mission objectives boil down to simply getting one colored key after another to advance, and controls are too cumbersome for a game of this type. And despite the 2D format, there are issues with the camera—it's either too far or too close, making enemies hard to see and resulting in cheap hits. Factor in the lack of two-player action and all that's left is a tepid experience.

_Matthew Hawkins

PUB MAJESCO | PRICE $9.99
DEV TERMINAL REALITY | PLAYERS 1
REL AVAILABLE NOW | ORIGIN U.S.A.

GMR LOST IN SPACE 4/10

BETTER THAN: MOST BUDGET-PRICED GAMES
NOT AS GOOD AS: CONTRA: SHATTERED SOLDIER
YOU'RE BETTER OFF: WATCHING ALIENS ON DVD

TOKYO XTREME RACER 3
A CRASH-UP WAITING TO HAPPEN

EVERYONE | PS2

In September 2000, Crave released *Tokyo Xtreme Racer* on Dreamcast, and it did fairly well. Unfortunately, the gaming industry moves at light speed, and coming into 2004, the series' third game can't come close to the current crop of racers. The graphics are horribly bland, the freeways never end, and apparently all of Tokyo's traffic is represented by a single yellow van.

Players race around looking for rivals and then challenge them to a race with a flash of their headlights. Why anyone would buy this game when there are so many better racers available is a mystery.

_ Dylan Hadrys

PUB CRAVE | PRICE $19.99
DEV GENKI | PLAYERS 1-2
REL AVAILABLE NOW | ORIGIN JAPAN

GMR WRONG WAY! 4/10

BETTER THAN: A CAR ACCIDENT
NOT AS GOOD AS: GRAN TURISMO 3: A-SPEC
WAIT FOR IT: GRAN TURISMO 4

XB
PS2

GBA REVIEW

LITTLE MEN AND WOMEN WAVING THEIR LITTLE SWORDS ON LITTLE SCREENS. THIS TRULY IS THE LIFE

ONIMUSHA TACTICS

TINY TOWNS OF TACTICAL TERROR

TEEN | GBA

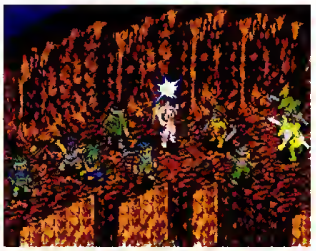
In case the wait for the third chapter in Capcom's thrilling *Onimusha* trilogy (thrillogy?) is too great to bear, *Onimusha Tactics* should provide an ample bridge for *O* fans champing at the bit. A strategy-RPG cast in the mold of peers such as *Tactics Ogre: The Knight of Lodis* and, more obviously, *Final Fantasy Tactics Advance*, *Onimusha Tactics* proves a competent (if not exceptional) foray into the field, but it's more significant for the plot threads it weaves than the gaming innovations it offers.

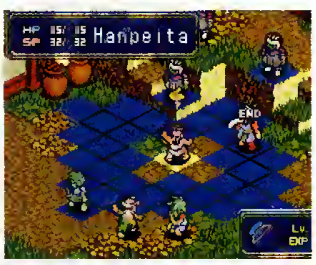
Like most strategy-RPGs, the game revolves around encounters that take place on static battlefields in which you move a troop of diverse fighters (samurai, ninja, archers, etc.) around with the primary goal of defeating a set number of enemies. In games like *FFTA*, the fundamental gameplay is made infinitely deeper by myriad mitigating factors, such as elevation, surface conditions, point of attack, etc. In *Onimusha Tactics*, few of these things make a difference. It's a simple matter of getting close to your foe and whacking away—a war of attrition in every sense. In fact, the only circumstance that makes any significant difference is when obstacles affect a rifleman's line of sight, limiting his effective range.

The game is also an extremely linear grind, with no option for revisiting previous levels, save for a 16-level Phantom Realm that coughs up a secret character if you conquer it. And while it's neat to use the secondary characters from *Onimusha 2*, the trite dialogue spoils the mood.

Visually, the game is on par with other titles in the genre. The weapon/item creation system is particularly cool, and despite the gripes (no multiplayer, sob), *Onimusha Tactics* is still solid fun. It is, actually, an above-average effort, but in a genre top-heavy with stellar alternatives, second best is not enough.

_James Mielke





PUB	CAPCOM	PRICE	$29.99
DEV	CAPCOM	PLAYERS	1
REL	AVAILABLE NOW	ORIGIN	JAPAN

GMR MY FIRST STRAT-RPG 7/10

NOT AS GOOD AS: FIRE EMBLEM
NOT AS GOOD AS: TACTICS OGRE: KNIGHT OF LODIS
NOT AS GOOD AS: ADVANCE WARS 2

SWORD OF MANA

YOU CAN'T COME HOME AGAIN

EVERYONE | GBA

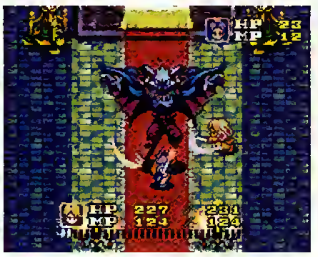
The highest compliment you can give *Sword of Mana* is that it doesn't feel like a remake at all. Ostensibly based on *Final Fantasy Adventure* (a classic Game Boy action-RPG), the game plays like a wholly different beast: The story has been drastically rewritten, and we're treated to lavish, SNES-caliber landscapes instead of black-and-white abstraction.

Once you begin playing, though, you realize that *Sword of Mana*'s interface is among the most ill-advised in recent memory. Case in point: Most enemies are vulnerable only to certain weapons or magic, so you need to switch your method of attack repeatedly—several times per battle, even. So, why did the developers stick the weapon-select screen two tiers deep within the game menu? It takes too long to pick another weapon, which messes up the game's tempo, making battles last longer than they should.

Your CPU-controlled partner is another weak link. In the original *Final Fantasy Adventure*, your second party member attacked enemies and did a reasonable job of keeping himself alive. Unfortunately, in *Sword of Mana*, he has a death wish—you'll see him walk merrily into lava pits, get caught on the edges of walls, and attack booby-trapped devices over and over again. To keep him alive, you have to jack him up with recovery items or magic at regular intervals. What's the point of even having him, then?

Despite all these flaws (not to mention its long-winded, nonsensical story), *Sword of Mana* is not a worthless game. The core action-RPG gameplay is still well executed, and only *Zelda: A Link to the Past* does it better on GBA. It's just not as fun as the original black-and-white game—which says something about just where the developer's priorities should have been.

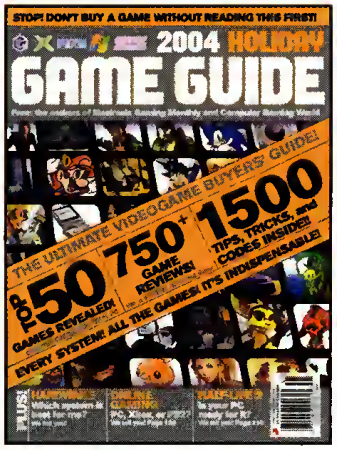
_Kevin Gifford



PUB	NINTENDO	PRICE	$29.99
DEV	BROWNIE BROWN	PLAYERS	1
REL	AVAILABLE NOW	ORIGIN	JAPAN

GMR HAGGARD 6/10

BETTER THAN: BBZ: LEGACY OF GOKU II
NOT AS GOOD AS: ZELDA: A LINK TO THE PAST
DOESN'T COME CLOSE TO: MARIO & LUIGI



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→ Times like these, you learn to play again

LORDS OF EVERQUEST

REAL-TIME STRATEGY 101

In the grand spirit of games like *Warcraft III*, Sony Online Entertainment's *Lords of EverQuest* brings the fantasy world of Norrath to the real-time strategy arena, allowing up to 12 players to duke it out online as any of three distinct *EverQuest*-ian factions. The hitch is, RTS games can be extremely tough to follow, especially for the uninitiated. If you're aching to jump online and pummel your friends into the ground (or just show some random strangers a thing or two), check out this handy-dandy little smattering of tips. Most of this advice can be applied to plenty of other RTS games as well—if you want to have that competitive edge, this is the stuff you definitely need to know. Now get out there and kicketh some ass!

PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE

The single most important strategy for any RTS game is to, well, play it. A lot. Experts don't become experts overnight; they play a lot (and lose a lot), then they learn to develop strategies, then they play a lot more (and start to win), then they come after YOU. You certainly won't need to devote a typically *EverQuest*-ish amount of time to get good, but you definitely won't get anywhere without putting in some serious time and effort.

LEARN TO LOVE THE HOTKEYS

Hotkey usage can make or break your game. There's a lot of stuff to keep track of, such as your resources, unit-production queues, building construction, army movements, and the special abilities of individual units. Manually clicking through everything with the mouse will slow you down to the point where your grandmother could probably beat you, whereas efficient use of hotkeys ensures you're more productive and less stressed. On a similar note, make a habit of binding units and buildings to the control groups (the numeric keys). Being able to flip between your army and specific buildings at your base is quick, convenient, and occasionally crucial when your opponent decides to pay you a surprise visit.

KNOW YOUR ENVIRONMENT

Having a measure of situational awareness can give you a distinct advantage over the opposition. Knowing the general map layout, where the potential starting points (and thus, your enemy's base) are, and the location and nature of strategic terrain (such as narrow, tough-to-navigate areas) will stack the game in a good player's favor even more. The locations of A.I.-controlled monsters are also fixed, so knowing where to go and what to kill will expedite your level-gaining process, especially early in the game.

SCOUT EARLY AND OFTEN

Knowing where your enemy is, what he's up to, and just what exactly he's sending to smash you into kibbles with is always a good idea. Send a couple of early units out to do some reconnaissance work, uncover some of the map, and get a jump on your opponent's progress. If you're feeling particularly daring, you might even send a lone troop or two in to harass his workers and interfere with his early resource-gathering process—or just kill some of the nearby A.I. spawn before he gets to it, denying him valuable experience points. Regardless, knowing is half the battle—and in many cases, this kind of advance knowledge can lead to a speedy victory if you play your cards right.

SPEND RESOURCES CAREFULLY

Many players tend to pump out units and fork over the cash for countless upgrades with little discretion or forethought. Not only does this waste precious platinum that could be used to better fill out your army, it also wastes time—time a skilled opponent will use to send a well-oiled army over to your neck of the woods and decimate you. Think carefully about what sorts of units and upgrades you want to use and purchase only the relevant stuff. For instance, if you're not building any units out of the siegeworks, don't purchase the upgrades (heck, don't even build a siegeworks). If you ever have excess resources to spend (and there's never such a thing as excess resources), spend them on things that you're actually going to use.

KNOW THYSELF

A dead 5th- or 6th-level unit is nothing but a waste of the time you spent leveling him up. Losing your powerful units in battle can severely cripple you, since starting from scratch with an army of low-level troops in the middle of a game is a virtual death sentence. Having a high-level lord can help offset this, but losing your entire army midgame is bound to hurt either way. Keep yourself attuned to what's going on, and don't sacrifice powerful units in battle unless you've got no choice. Make sure you're always aware of what your troops are capable of, too—especially your lords and knights. All those nifty powers and radius auras won't do much good if you're not using them.

MICROMANAGE BATTLES EFFICIENTLY

Anyone can build a mass of troops, but only a skilled player can make effective use of them in actual combat situations. Simply walking a swarm of units into a fight and hoping for the best is a surefire way to find yourself frantically queuing up a recruiter to resurrect your dead lord right before you start rebuilding your now nonexistent army. Micromanaging encompasses many different things—using your lord's powers, assigning different types of troops to different control groups, managing individual units under pressure, and keeping a close eye on health meters are all key to effectively micromanaging your gameplay. Good thing you've got all those hotkeys to help you out!

ADAPT OR PERISH

No matter how solid your strategy is and no matter how confident you are in your army, you have to be willing and able to totally switch your techniques at a moment's notice. Maybe your opponent is using troops that you hadn't anticipated—troops that your own army is near-useless against. Or maybe you suddenly realize what sort of strategy the opposition is angling for. Whatever the case may be, you'll need to have the ingenuity to change your game on the fly. Fortunately, this sort of street-smart instinct can be learned through—you guessed it—lots and lots of practice.

KEEP THE OFFENSIVE ADVANTAGE

Being proactive is one of the keys to winning. Simply building up a mass of defenses and biding your time as you wait for your opponent to make a move just doesn't work in most cases. Time not spent eliminating the enemy's troops is time that he has to mass an army with which to whomp your ass. Instead, take the ball and keep it. Staying on the offensive and keeping your opponent constantly looking over his shoulder gives you a definite edge. This is an aggressive game—and the most aggressive player is, more often than not, the clear winner from the get-go.

DON'T PUT ALL YOUR EGGS IN ONE BASKET

As enticing as it might sometimes be to assemble all the troops and go rampaging around the countryside, it's usually a good idea to leave a few capable units on guard duty at your home base—in the event that you get blindsided by a surprise attack, they'll buy you a bit of time (if nothing else) to hightail your main army back to HQ. Just don't overdo it—keeping half your units at home just ensures that you'll be half as strong and probably end up twice as dead.

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL EDGE

This may sound kind of hokey to some, but the best RTS players will tell you that it's often critical to build a psychological advantage during a game. This ties in a bit with the notion of staying on the offensive—a proactive foe is usually viewed as a powerful foe, which can cow a lot of easily manipulated opponents into outright conceding. If you've got the time to manage it, try to hold an ongoing conversation with your foe as well—we're not advocating cheap trash-talk or anything, but it's entirely possible to weave a subtle web of panic around your opponent if you know how to push his buttons. If your enemy is convinced that the game is hopeless (whether it is or not), it gives you a lot of momentum—take advantage of it whenever you get the chance!

A.I.

HIS CODES ARE REAL. BUT HE IS NOT

Chances are good you've seen *Return of the King* by now. But if you haven't, head to a theater immediately. Take *GMR* with you and read it while you wait. Then head straight to the nearest store and sign up for a subscription.

01 LORD OF THE RINGS: RETURN OF THE KING PS2, XB, GC

Ignoring the bomb that was *The Matrix: Revolutions*, *The Lord of the Rings: Return of the King* was the most anticipated movie of 2003. EA's interpretation of Peter Jackson's interpretation of Tolkien's masterpiece should not be missed, and it's available on all three platforms.

1,000 Extra Experience Points
Regardless of which system you're on, pause the game and hold the shoulder buttons (all four on PS2, both on Cube and Xbox). Then, depending on which character and which system you're using, enter the following codes to help you vanquish the One Ring. Each code can be entered as many times as you wish, but be sure to release the triggers before reentering them.

XB

PS2

GC

	PS2	Xbox	GameCube
Aragorn	Up, Square, Triangle, X	Up, X, Y, A	Up, B, Y, A
Frodo	Down, Triangle, Up, Down	Down, Y, Up, Down	Down, Y, Up, Down
Gandalf	Circle, Triangle, Up, Down	B, Y, Up, Down	X, Y, Up, Down
Gimli	Circle, Circle, Triangle, X	B, B, Y, A	X, X, Y, A
Legolas	X, Triangle, Up, X	A, Y, Up, A	A, Y, Up, A
Sam	Triangle, X, Down, X	Y, A, Down, A	Y, A, Down, A

02 TONY HAWK'S UNDERGROUND PS2, XB, GC

This time it's all about you, the underground gamer. What can we expect in *Tony Hawk 6*? Customizable E3 booth babes would be nice....

Cheat Codes
Go to the Dptions screen, then enter these under the Cheat section.
Moon gravity: getitup
Perfect manuals: keepitsteady
Perfect rail balance: letitslide

03 MANHUNT PS2

It's a nasty world, especially when every man in sight is gunning for you. If you're playing this game properly—all alone with the lights off—then you should be scared to death. But if fear is making you play poorly, we can help even the score. To unlock these codes, you must first beat the listed two levels with at least a three-star rating. Then you can enter the following codes at the Main menu.

Fully equipped:
Beat Drunk Driving and Graveyard Shift
R1, R2, L1, L2, Down, Up, Left, Up
Helium hunters:
Beat Strapped for Cash and View of Innocence
R1, R1, Triangle, Circle, Square, L2, L1, Down
Invisibility:
Beat Trained to Kill and Border Patrol
Square, Square, Square, Down, Square, Down, Circle, Up
Monkey skin:
Beat Press Coverage and Wrong Side of the Tracks
Square, Square, R2, Down, Triangle, Square, Circle, Down
Rabbit skin:
Beat Kill the Rabbit and Divided They Fall
Left, R1, R1, Triangle, R1, R1, Square, L1
Regeneration:
Beat Fueled by Hate and Grounds for Assault
R2, Right, Circle, R2, L2, Down, Circle, Left
Runner:
Beat Born Again and Doorway Into Hell
R2, R2, L1, R2, Left, Right, Left, Right
Super punch:
Beat Mouth of Madness and Doing Time
L1, Triangle, Triangle, Triangle, Circle, Circle, Circle, R1

04 BACKYARD WRESTLING: DON'T TRY THIS AT HOME PS2, XB

Those wimps in the WWE have it easy—but don't tell Brock Lesnar you heard it from us. If you're looking for extreme pain, this is your game.

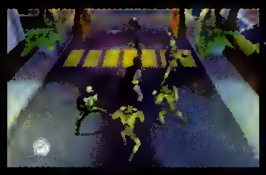
To unlock the Cheat menu
PS2
From the Main menu, hold down L1 and press X, Triangle, X, Triangle, Circle.
Xbox
From the Main menu, hold down L1 and press A, X, Y, B, Y, X, A, B.

Unlocking cheats with create-a-wrestler names
Dther cheats can be unlocked by making your own wrassler with the following names.
Unlock all cheats: donttrythisathome
Toon character: pstapley
Toon backgrounds: mbilodeau
Ghost: pjefferies
Greyscale: ksimeonov
Wireframe: ewilliams
First-person camera: edma
Player one invulnerable: jche
Player two invulnerable: cbarlow
Invulnerable players: denicholas
Player one unlimited supers: ddaniels
Player two unlimited supers: jmaxwell
Hardcore A.I.: stomanovski
Big head, big hands, and big feet: tho

05 BATMAN: RISE OF SIN TZU PS2

Gotham City proving to be a bit too much of a challenge? Go to the Title screen and enter these codes. For each code, hold down all four shoulder buttons, then punch in the combo on the digital pad.

Unlimited health
Up, Right, Down, Left, Up, Left, Down, Right
Unlimited combo meter
Left, Right, Up, Down, Right, Left, Down, Up
All upgrades
Up, Up, Left, Left, Right, Right, Down, Down
End-game rewards
Down, Up, Down, Up, Left, Right, Left, Right
Dark Knight difficulty level
Down, Left, Right, Up, Up, Right, Left, Down



06 FUTURAMA XB

All codes are entered while playing the game. Hold the left trigger during the entire code. If the code letter is UPPERCASE, hold the right trigger while you press the button. These are nasty, but they work.

Extras
Fill in the blank with the corresponding button
a, X, Y, a, X, Y, B, A, BLACK, __, BACK

Health: y
Ammo: b
Lives: a
Charge: x
Immortality: Y

Level select
Fill in the blanks with the code for the level you want
a, X, Y, a, X, Y, X, Y, __, __, BACK

Planet Express: y, y
Sewers: y, b
Subway: y, a
Old New York: y, x
Red Light District: y, Y
Uptown: y, B
Weasel Canyon: b, y
Mine Facility: b, a
Run Bender Run: b, b
Red Rock Creek: b, x
The Junkyard: b, Y
Rumble in the Junkyard: b, B
Market Square: a, y
Left Wing: a, b
Right Wing: a, a
Temple Courtyard: a, x
Inner Temple: a, Y
Bogad Swamp Trail: x, y
Bender's Breakout: Y, y
Leela's Last Laugh: Y, b
Fry Fights Back: Y, a

07 PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN GBA

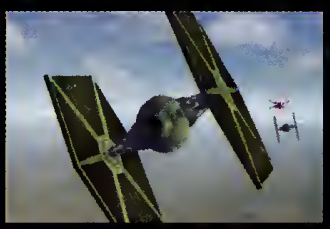
Enter any of the following codes to skip to a different level with full health:

?Z4YVTXSTZ
DNNBSZPW6P
XBTBYFJXW?
P4RMGLXR?R
X3PQ730JXY
RPZK04HQ56
6L9QFVBH1Z
S3YP9P?6QR

08 SECRET WEAPONS OVER NORMANDY PS2, XB, PC

We're starting to suspect that there's some sort of contractual obligation to include *Star Wars* references in every game LucasArts publishes. Aside from the subtle quotes uttered by some pilots, ***SWON*** also happens to feature another small, subtle bonus: flyable X-wings and TIE fighters. Yeah, like we said, no big deal....

In order to unlock the famous fictional craft, simply finish all 15 missions of the main campaign and all 21 challenge missions. You can only use the X-wing and TIE in the instant action mode, but it's still totally worth it.



09 MEDAL OF HONOR: RISING SUN PS2, XB, GC

Electronic Arts makes our list again with a second group of codes for a trio of systems, this time with a game about the Pacific theater in World War II. Punch in these codes for the console of your choice.

	PS2	Xbox	GameCube
Achilles head	MANDARIN	CARDINAL	CHICLID
Bullet shield	TANG	WRASSE	GDURAMI
Invisible soldiers	TRIGGER	PARRDT	ZEBRA
Rubber grenades	DAMSEL	BETTA	MDDR
All replay items	GARIBALDI	BOXFISH	LOACH
Men with hats	SEAHORSE	DDTTYBACK	TETRA
Silver bullet mode	TILEFISH	BATFISH	PLECO
Unlimited ammo	GDBY	JAWFISH	DISCUS

10 TERMINATOR 3: RISE OF THE MACHINES PS2

If the governor of California is too busy to give you help with this game, use these codes below to call in some favors. Next up: James Cameron as the surgeon general.

Code	Effect
Square, Triangle, Square, Triangle, Circle, X, Circle, X	50% more health for TX in combat
Triangle, Triangle, Square, X, Circle, Triangle, Square, Circle	50% more health in combat with TX
X, X, X, Triangle, Circle, Circle, Square, X	All future weapons
Circle, Circle, Triangle, Square, X, Triangle, Triangle, Square	All past weapons
Square, Square, X, Triangle, X, Circle, X, Circle	Invincibility
X, Triangle, Triangle, Triangle, X, Circle, X, Square	Unlimited ammunition

XB
PC
PS2
GC

CONNECT

DOWNLOADS, DIARIES AND NEWS FROM THE WORLD OF ONLINE GAMING

ONLINE GAMING

NEGOTIATING WITH HOST...

Hi there! By now you might be wondering, either aloud or quietly to yourself, "Hey, where did Screen go?" To that, we respond, "We moved Screen to the front of the magazine a couple months ago. Where have you been?" With two pages now available for even more of the high-quality content you expect from *GMR*, it's high time we start seriously discussing an important aspect of the industry that deserves proper attention.

So, welcome to Connect, *GMR*'s new online section. Every month, we'll take a closer look at what's going on in the increasingly popular online-gaming arena. What have we got cooked up? News stories pertaining to all that is online gaming, running diaries of massively multiplayer online experiences (starting with our own James Mielke living large in *Final Fantasy XI*), reviews of downloadable content like bonus levels, characters, and items (and perhaps even a fashion critique should a new swimsuit be made available for Solid Snake). What else? Periodic reviews of persistent online experiences, and the three most compelling downloads we can find before deadline. We'll also feature a host of guest writers opining about all that is good and bad about playing games over the Internet. Be it MMO, RPG, FPS, RTS, and everything else without an acronym...get ready to connect. OK, that was lame. Sorry.

ZOOM ZOOM

IT'S TIME TO GO PLACES IN STAR WARS GALAXIES

NEWS

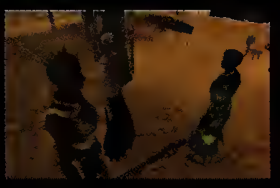
Star Wars just ain't *Star Wars* without all the sick vehicles, and apparently the designers of *Star Wars Galaxies* have just realized this. The patch coming out this month (December 2003) promises to introduce player-operated vehicles to the game for the first time ever. Presumably, all the "swoop gang members" you fight outside of Mos Eisley will actually pilot swoops. But let's not get ahead of ourselves.

The patch will introduce three types of vehicles: landspeeders, speeder bikes, and swoops. Landspeeders are the ugly, roundish, brown things that Luke rode around in during the first movie; speeder bikes are what you saw in the forest scenes of *Return of the Jedi*; and swoops are bigger, slower speeder-bike-type-things that can fly a bit higher.

Players will be able to build these vehicles themselves, if they have the appropriate skills and can get their hands on the schematics. They'll also be able to buy them off of those with the ability to make them. The designers plan for the vehicles to become the primary mode of ground transportation in the game (above the recently introduced mounts), though anyone who's played these games for a minute will know that intrepid players will find ways to subvert their intended functions. Can anyone say vehicular homicide?

With the first Jedi in the *SWG* universe recently unlocked (and subsequently sold for a grip on eBay), all that's left now for the game to be real-deal *Star Wars* is the addition of spacecraft. We'll let you know when this goes down...or up.

_ Miguel Lopez



DOWNLOAD THIS!

Every month we'll pick three of the most interesting or appropriate downloads we come across. Like these!

AMERICA'S ARMY V2.0

http://www.americasarmy.com/

If you've got what it takes to finish the rigorous Green Beret training exercises, you'll have the opportunity to try your hand at various combat roles in a wide range of tactical multiplayer missions.

COUNTER-STRIKE V1.5 PATCH

http://counterstrike.sierra.com/

The fact that people are still hooked on *Counter-Strike* four years later is an impressive testament to its quality. And with the recent v1.5 patch, *Counter-Strike* isn't likely to go away anytime soon.

DAY OF DEFEAT V1.0 (HALF-LIFE MOD)

http://www.dayofdefeat.com/

Day of Defeat is a full World War II conversion, focusing on tactical, squad-based multiplayer missions—many of which are based on historical battles. There's even built-in voice communication support. Take that, *SOCOM*!

MY LIFE IN VANA'DIEL

A MONTHLY TRAVELOGUE OF ONE EDITOR'S TIME IN FINAL FANTASY XI

MILKMAN

RED MAGE

MAIN JOB LEVEL: 13
SUBJOB LEVEL: 0
NATION: WINDURST
RACE: HUME
SERVER: SIREN

With *Final Fantasy XI* less than a couple months old, it seems like the time is ripe to document my progression through the game, giving our readers a month-by-month taste of what it's like to make your way through Square Enix's massively multiplayer online RPG in neo-quasi real time.

Of the three different nations you can choose as your base of operations, I picked the tarutaru-populated nation of Windurst as my home. It's a place of quiet serenity, bracketed on all sides by babbling brooks and leafy vegetation. As I learned during the original beta-test period, the first thing you really want to do is go outside the safety of the city gates and get yourself some experience. If you talk to a guard with the designation "W.W." at any of the gates leading outside the city, he'll cast "signet" on you, which will allow you to collect various crystals from creatures you've killed. These are good for using in crafts or for selling at the auction house. The economic system in *FFXI*, while requiring significant effort, is one of the most impressive elements of the game. You can create quite a cottage industry for yourself if you specialize in a skill that can help other players in their travels, earning you that all-important gil (cash) that will help you buy better armor and weapons for yourself.

Early on, while attempting to complete some of the game's early missions, I happened upon another solo traveler named Lyonheart. Since that day, we've been an inseparable duo, tackling the game's missions and quests together, while gaining levels much faster than if we'd been playing solo. We eventually invested in a Linkshell (*FFXI*'s most powerful communication tool) and have since added a horde of allies to our group. Check back next month to see if I've managed to reach level 18 and procure a subjob.

_ James Mielke

→ If you learn anything playing *Final Fantasy XI*, it's that you don't get very far playing solo. Wandering out into unknown territory by yourself is almost a guaranteed one-way ticket back home. You don't lose any items or money, but the game takes a hefty chunk of experience out of your back pocket, and that's worse than anything.

RETROACTIVE

FINAL FANTASY VII: BECAUSE ONE PAGE JUST WASN'T ENOUGH

PS2

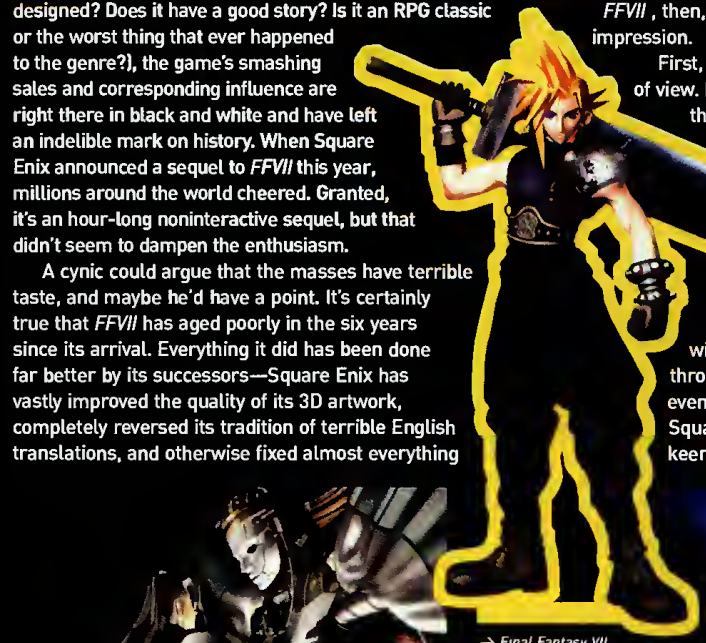
FINAL FANTASY VII
BEST ARGUMENT STARTER EVER

PLAYSTATION | SEPTEMBER 1997

Final Fantasy VII's only inarguable quality is its success. While everything else is open to debate (is it well designed? Does it have a good story? Is it an RPG classic or the worst thing that ever happened to the genre?), the game's smashing sales and corresponding influence are right there in black and white and have left an indelible mark on history. When Square Enix announced a sequel to *FFVII* this year, millions around the world cheered. Granted, it's an hour-long noninteractive sequel, but that didn't seem to dampen the enthusiasm.

A cynic could argue that the masses have terrible taste, and maybe he'd have a point. It's certainly true that *FFVII* has aged poorly in the six years since its arrival. Everything it did has been done far better by its successors—Square Enix has vastly improved the quality of its 3D artwork, completely reversed its tradition of terrible English translations, and otherwise fixed almost everything *FFVII* arguably did wrong. But still, nobody clamors for, say, a *Final Fantasy VIII* sequel, or at least not all that loudly. *FFVII* , then, is a testament to the power of a first impression.

First, think about it from a serious gamer's point of view. For that end of the market, *FFVII* was not all that new. Hardcore fans had been there and done that on Super Nintendo. While the series' PlayStation debut looked a lot prettier, its gameplay and storytelling style were just variations of established themes. *Final Fantasy II* defined the template of active-time battles mixed with a globetrotting adventure that continued through *Final Fantasy III* and *Chrono Trigger*, eventually leading to *FFVII* 's foundation. All Square added were flashy 3D graphics and a keen snowboarding minigame—fun stuff, sure,



→ *Final Fantasy VII* represents the first and last flowering of designer Tetsuya Nomura's interest in big, clunky combat boots.

but you can see where RPG diehards are coming from when they downplay *FFVII* 's achievements.

Now imagine that *FFVII* is your first RPG. You've never played anything like it. You've never seen a 40-hour world-spanning epic. You've never gotten to know characters you actually cared for, and you've never seen one of those heroes die and not return. You've never heard Nobuo Uematsu composing at the top of his form. You've never min-maxed equipment modifications before or seen a Bahamut summoning. You think broken English localization is cute and kind of funny, since you've never played a game with a script that had actually been edited by a native English speaker. All this stuff is new and cool and beautiful, even if the CG characters haven't quite acquired mouths yet.

That was the experience millions of players had after Sony hooked them with its campaign to bring RPGs into the mainstream. Like it or not, that Christmas blitz of movie trailers and TV ads in the fall of 1997 made legions of casual gamers into *Final Fantasy* fans—and RPG fans as well.

With six years of hindsight standing between then and now, is *FFVII* as great as its biggest fans have come to bill it? Certainly not, but in an ironic turn, it only has itself to blame for the games that have eclipsed it. It is because *FFVII* did so well that modern RPGs are so much better—the genre's arrival in the U.S. meant bigger budgets, better production values, and top-notch localizations for games such as *Chrono Cross*, *Xenosaga*, and *Final Fantasy X*. If it weren't for *FFVII*, games such as *Dragon Warrior VII* and *Valkyrie Profile* might never have even made it to the United States to become the darlings of the hardcore RPG set.

If you can't give Square's classic its propers as a game—and after so many years of rapid evolution in the genre, it's hard to ignore the flaws—then at least give it respect as a historical event. Like it, love it, or hate it with a passion, every American gamer owes a debt to *FFVII*.

DEATH IN MIDGARD

RPG heroes have died before—past *FF* games saw their share of permanent partings—but Aeris's death earned a special place in history. What is it about that moment that stuck in so many players' minds? Remember, in 1997 cinematic RPGs were a revolution, not an established tradition. More than a year before *Metal Gear Solid*, even simple CG cinemas could have a powerful impact.

CREATED A MONSTER

Tetsuya Nomura made his debut with *FFVII*, immediately making a splash as one of gaming's most popular character designers. Like so many other issues, the characters defined the line between new-school fans and grumpy old gamers—new *FF* followers dug Nomura's clean, iconic style, while the 16-bit survivors clamored for Yoshitaka Amano's ornate creations.

EPILOGUE OR PROLOGUE?

If you don't want to argue over whether *FFVII* was any good or not, you can still argue over what actually happened at the end. Did the whole world go up in smoke, or was it just Midgar that got wiped off the planet? Now that *Final Fantasy VII Advent Children* is in the works, the latter explanation sounds more likely, but we'll have to wait 'til next year to see.

_Dave Smith

NOW... The graphics are iffy, the translation is poor, and Sephiroth is an effeminate gimp. Millions still love him, however.

EASY TO FIND

GMR REVIVED 7/10

THEN... Genre-defining if you weren't an RPG fan, genre-redefining if you were, and a massive historical landmark from either perspective.

GMR HOLY 9/10

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Kansas City, MO
Denver, CO
Seattle, WA
Portland, OR
San Francisco, CA
San Jose, CA
Las Vegas, NV
Phoenix, AZ
San Diego, CA
Los Angeles, CA

THE LIST

GMA'S EXHAUSTIVE GUIDE TO THE ONLY GAMES THAT MATTEA

BUYER'S GUIDE

PS2 TOP 100 NOW WITH MORE NEW GAMES

TITLE	PUBLISHER	WHAT WE SAY	GMR RATING
.hack//Mutation	Bandai	We've exhausted our supply of "something within a something" jokes, so just know that the series starts to pick up in this sequel.	8
Amplitude	Sony	A whole slew of new artists who, naturally, bring along brand-new tunes for your button-pressing pleasure.	8
Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance	Interplay	A beautiful-looking *Dungeons & Dragons*–based hack-n-slash that can be played cooperatively with another player.	9
Beyond Good & Evil	Ubisoft	*Rayman* creator Michel Ancel has done it again: *BG&E* is a spectacular adventure.	9
Bombastic	Capcom	Kudos to Capcom for bringing over the excellent *Devil Dice* series. Roll those dice, daddy needs a new pair of DualShocks.	8
Breath of Fire: Dragon Quarter	Capcom	An RPG that forces you to die and start over multiple times? It sounds ridiculous, but it actually works.	8
Burnout 2: Point of Impact	Acclaim	An aggressive driving simulator that defies the rules of physics. Includes a dedicated Crash mode for aspiring demolition-derby stars.	8
Capcom vs. SNK 2	Capcom	Take the best elements of *Street Fighter* and *King of Fighters*, and you'll have the best thing going in the world of 2D combat.	8
Castlevania: Lament of Innocence	Konami	The *Castlevania* franchise goes 3D (again!). It's different from what we're used to, but it's still good.	8
Chaos Legion	Capcom	Storm through 15 levels of nonstop action, commanding various squads of bodyguards. It's like *Devil May Cry*, only not so antisocial.	8
Colin McRae Rally 3	Codemasters	A superb rally racer with superrealistic properties—right down to the extended time you spend sitting in the Ford Focus.	8
Contra: Shattered Soldier	Konami	After numerous shoddy attempts to bring the classic *Contra* gameplay to a next-gen system, Konami finally gets it right.	9
Dance Dance Revolution: DDRMax	Konami	Before, if you wanted to play *DDR*, you had to subject yourself to Joe and Jane Public. Now you can embarrass yourself at home.	8
Dark Cloud 2	Sony	Improves upon the first one in every way imaginable. Building and upgrading weapons to your liking is a blast.	9
Dave Mirra Freestyle BMX 2	Acclaim	Before turning to Larry Flynt for inspiration, *XXX* was based on the well-mannered Dave Mirra and actually focused on biking.	8
Devil May Cry	Capcom	Did you know *Devil May Cry* was going to be *Resident Evil 4* before it was spun off as its own series? Oh, you did? Never mind, then.	9
Disgaea: Hour of Darkness	Atlus	Aside from being a fantastically deep strategy game, *Disgaea* is also the funniest strategy-RPG we've ever played.	8
Dynasty Warriors 3	Koei	Melee combat set to the history of ancient China. Enemies number in the hundreds along branching story paths.	8
Escape from Monkey Island	LucasArts	LucasArts has a fine tradition of putting out excellent graphical adventure games, and this latest charmer is no exception.	8
ESPN NBA Basketball	Sega	It's the best looking basketball game this year, and it's marginally the best playing one, too.	8
ESPN NFL Football	Sega	The new first-person mode is an interesting addition to a solid game of football, but it's still not enough to top *Madden*.	8
ESPN NHL Hockey	Sega	The game formerly known as *NHL2K*(x), where the (x) is the last digit of the year we're in. Oh yeah, it's still really good.	8
EverQuest Online Adventures	Sony Online	PS2 owners finally get to see what the whole *EverQuest* thing is about—and will never be seen again.	8
Final Fantasy X	Square EA	PS2's first *Final Fantasy* does away the traditional overworld but introduces full voice acting. Artistically beautiful, as always.	9
Final Fantasy X-2	Square EA	Yuna and company put a fresh set of clothes on *Final Fantasy X*'s gameplay. Hey, ladies!	9
Gran Turismo 3 A-spec	Sony	Core gameplay is unchanged, but the graphics get a complete overhaul, which makes *GT3* the best-playing/looking sim on the market.	10
Grand Theft Auto: Double Pack	Rockstar Games	Containing both *Grand Theft Auto III* and *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City*, this is the value of the year. Now go get your mob on.	10
Guilty Gear XX	Sammy	Tired of waiting for *Street Fighter 4*? This one should more than compensate. Great visuals, great control, and great extras.	8
Half-Life	Sierra	After it was cancelled for Dreamcast, a console version of this PC classic didn't seem very likely. But here we are.	8
Harry Potter: Quidditch World Cup	Electronic Arts	J.K. Rowling's fantasy sport is surprisingly playable in videogame form. We wonder what Sega's *ESPN Quidditch* would be like....	8
High Heat 2004	300	The best baseball game available this year. "Simulation" doesn't seem like a strong enough word to describe it.	8
Hitman 2	Eidos	Most of the problems with the original *Hitman* have been fixed, making this one of the more rewarding action games on PS2.	9
Hot Shots Golf 3	Sony	Some golf games need something extra to attract gamers. How about arcade-style control, annoying taunts, and multiplayer modes?	9
Ico	Sony	An underappreciated work of art with challenging puzzles, fantastic lighting, and engrossing character relationships.	9
Jak II	Sony	*Jak II* tries to be everything to all gamers, and it ends up getting a lot of it right, but it's still derivative.	8
K-1 Grand Prix	Konami	The budding sport of K-1 is faithfully represented here, as are the knockout blows to the jaw that sound just as painful as they look.	8
Karaoke Revolution	Konami	Can't carry a tune? Seriously, this game is still for you. Bring on the append discs!	8
KillSwitch	Namco	Namco's action-shooter uses the concept of cover to create battles with intensity. Not that battles usually aren't intense, mind you....	8
Kingdom Hearts	Square EA	When the amazing, talented artists from Square join forces with the amazing, talented artists from Disney, good things happen.	8
Klonoa 2: Lunatea's Veil	Namco	*Klonoa* became a rare find in PlayStation's later days. The outstanding sequel looks to share the same fate. Grab it if you can.	8
The Lord of the Rings: Return of the King	Electronic Arts	The series concludes with EA's best *LOTR* effort, an improvement on *The Two Towers* that looks fantastic.	8
The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers	Electronic Arts	Anything bearing the valuable *Lord of the Rings* license will sell well. Happily, there's more to this beat-em-up than just the name.	8
Madden NFL 2004	Electronic Arts	New this year is the Playmaker system of adjusting plays as they happen, as well as a comprehensive Owner mode.	8
The Mark of Kri	Sony	A slick action game with innovative controls: Each button is assigned to a different enemy, allowing for combat with multiple targets.	8
Maximo: Ghosts to Glory	Capcom	It's the spiritual successor to the classic *Ghosts 'n' Goblins*, complete with heart boxers and insane difficulty.	8
MDK 2: Armageddon	Interplay	Much improved over the original Dreamcast incarnation, *MDK 2: Armageddon* is one of the better recent action games.	8
Medal of Honor: Frontline	Electronic Arts	A strong single-player campaign paves the way through the beaches of Normandy and the heart of France. Great audio.	8
Metal Gear Solid 2: Substance	Konami	There's a lot in this update: 350 VR missions, 150 alternate missions, five Snake Tales, and one skateboard. Yes, a skateboard.	9
MotoGP 3	Namco	After three attempts, Namco got it right...sort of. The realism is astounding, as long as you ignore the giant Mr. Driller.	8
NASCAR Thunder 2004	Electronic Arts	It's a lot like last year's version of *Thunder*, only better. Obviously for the NASCAR fans.	8

PS2

TITLE	PUBLISHER	WHAT WE SAY	GMR RATING
NBA Live 2004	Electronic Arts	Should you upgrade to the latest version of Live? As new announcer Marv Albert would say, "YES!"	8
NBA Street Vol. 2	Electronic Arts	Even better than the first, *Vol. 2* takes you through the legendary players and teams of the NBA's storied history. A great deal of fun.	9
NCAA Football 2004	Electronic Arts	EA took the excellent *NCAA 2003*, added some new blocking and pass-defense enhancements, and produced another winner.	9
Need for Speed: Hot Pursuit 2	Electronic Arts	Strangely, the game's best version is on the least-powerful hardware. Running from cops has never been this fun or consequence free.	9
Need for Speed Underground	Electronic Arts	All the thrills of illegal street racing without having to run from the cops. Unless you steal your copy.	9
NFL Blitz Pro	Midway	The arcade game that was based on regular football is now a regular football game based on the arcade version of regular football.	8
NHL 2004	Electronic Arts	It doesn't look as good as its competitors, but then again, you don't need to be pretty to score goals.	8
NHL Hitz Pro	Midway	It's hardly realistic, but it's not supposed to be. It's also the closest we'll ever get to a new *Ice Hockey* or *Blades of Steel*.	8
Onimusha 2: Samurai's Destiny	Capcom	The effort put forward in defeating Nobunga in *Onimusha* has gone to waste, as he's risen from the dead to appear in the sequel.	8
Onimusha: Warlords	Capcom	Survival-horror with a taste for feudal Japan, gorgeous artistic design, and a whole lot more action than its *Resident Evil* kin.	8
Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time	Ubisoft	This is the right way to bring back a classic... if only the camera were more manageable.	8
RAD: Robot Alchemic Drive	Enix	It's hard to go wrong with giant robots blowing stuff up, but Enix's latest effort goes one step further with a novel control scheme.	8
Ratchet & Clank: Going Commando	Sony	*Going Commando* borrows ingredients from other genres and makes a giant casserole of awesome.	9
Rayman 2: Revolution	Ubisoft	One of the best 3D platformers available, the *Rayman* franchise doesn't get the attention it deserves.	9
Resident Evil Code: Veronica X	Capcom	More of a true sequel than *Resident Evil 3*, its Dreamcast debut meant many fans missed out. Problem solved!	8
Rez	Sega	A fairly standard shooter dressed as a visual and aural masterpiece. Sadly unappreciated by the vast majority of the gaming world.	8
Rygar: The Legendary Adventure	Tecmo	This Greek-mythology-based action game is an update of the arcade and NES classic in name only. Fun combat and great music.	9
Sega Sports Tennis	Sega	Arcade-style tennis perfection when it launched for Dreamcast. It's holding up just as well on PS2.	8
Silent Hill 3	Konami	The third chapter of this grisly horror show once again has you running down dark hallways with a flashlight.	8
The Simpsons: Hit & Run	Vivendi Universal	Holy crap! It's a good *Simpsons* game! Gamers will enjoy the fun driving missions, and fans will eat up the references.	8
The Sims	Electronic Arts	A new mode helps you figure out how to keep your Sim from pissing himself. Or, if you're like that, how to make him do it.	9
The Sims: Bustin' Out	Electronic Arts	All the familiar goodness of *The Sims*, but now with branching career paths, two-player co-op, and more.	9
Sky Gunner	Atlus	If you can look past the slowdown issue (and it can be a pretty big issue at times), *Sky Gunner* is great shooting fun.	8
Sly Cooper and the Thievius Raccoonus	Sony	A solid platformer with a unique aesthetic and animations. Lacks a little in the challenge department; it's a little on the short side, too.	8
SOCOM: U.S. Navy SEALs	Sony	Possibly the the best reason to own a PS2 Network Adaptor. The team-based military tactics work better online than off.	9
SOCOM II	Sony	Everything you loved about the first SOCOM, now with less of everything you didn't like so much.	9
Soul Calibur 2	Namco	Better than the original, but not as innovative as we would have liked. The single-player game isn't as good as *VF4: Evolution*.	9
Space Channel 5: Special Edition	Agetec	Shake your groove thing, shake your groove thing, yeah yeah! Includes the original *Space Channel 5* and its sequel.	8
Splinter Cell	Ubisoft	As expected, the PS2 port of the Xbox original takes a graphical hit. Doesn't mean it's not still a great game, though.	8
SpyHunter	Midway	A re-creation of the classic that manages to avoid tarnishing all the good memories, which can't be said for a lot of classic remakes.	8
SSX 3	Electronic Arts	EA ditches individual courses in favor of one giant mountain and ends up making the best *SSX* yet.	9
Sub Rebellion	Metro3D	Customizable submarines rule the waters of the future; *Sub Rebellion* is an action game that's short on graphics but very entertaining.	8
Tekken Tag Tournament	Namco	Essentially *Tekken 3* with enhanced graphics and tag-teaming. Which isn't bad, considering *Tekken 3* is a great game to begin with.	8
Tenchu: Wrath of Heaven	Activision	*Tenchu* sneaked onto the list without us noticing. We were drunk on sake and telling tales of heroism, so that might be why.	8
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004	Electronic Arts	Tiger Woods made golf cool (sort of). *Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004* makes golf games cool (sort of).	9
TimeSplitters 2	Eidos	Everything good about the original is here, with loads of new multiplayer options, including maps, weapons, and game modes, too.	8
Tokyo Xtreme Racer Zero	Crave	Cruise Tokyo's highways in search of less-than-legal street-racing action. Despite some visual issues, it's definitely worth checking out.	8
Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4	Activision	Neversoft dropped the two-minute time limit in Career mode and added an array of objectives. Level design is a step up from *THPS3*.	9
Tony Hawk's Underground	Activision	The depth and versatility of THUG's customizable gameplay make it the best *Hawk* yet.	10
Twisted Metal: Black	Sony	With the franchise safely out of the hands of 989 Studios, *Twisted Metal* makes a welcome return to its former gruesome glory.	9
Virtua Fighter 4: Evolution	Sega	The greatest 3D fighter ever created, and it's only a measly $20. Mow the lawn twice, and it's yours.	10
Wakeboarding Unleashed	Activision	A surprisingly stellar extreme-sports title that manages to make the *Tony Hawk* formula work on water. Watch out for the gators.	9
War of the Monsters	Sony	King Kong's agent wanted a cool $20 mil. for this fun beat-em-up, but Sony balked and went with the less-recognizable Congar.	9
Wild Arms 3	Sony	A grand adventure with a Wild West theme, endearing characters, great music, and a refreshingly uncomplicated battle system.	8
Wipeout Fusion	Bam	The Designer's Republic touch may be missing, but the series' oft-imitated, never-surpassed style of racing remains intact.	8
World Soccer: Winning Eleven 6	Konami	Feet down, the most natural-feeling soccer game ever. It lacks *FIFA*'s presentation and licenses, but makes up for it in gameplay.	9
WWE SmackDown! Here Comes the Pain	THQ	Much better than the previous *SmackDown!*, *HCTP* improves the previously flawed grappling system.	8
WWF SmackDown!: Just Bring It	THQ	Even if this game scored a zero, it would still sell a truckload of copies. Such is the marketing power of Vince McMahon and family.	8
Xenosaga	Namco	A massive RPG of epic story and length. Namco's now in charge of the *Xeno* series, and this is the first of many planned chapters.	9
Zone of the Enders: The 2nd Runner	Konami	Better enemies, better pacing, better music, better stages, and better weapons. What we're trying to say is, *ZOE2* is better than the first.	8

[BUY!]

BOMBASTIC

The sequel to 1998's *Devil Dice*, the unfamiliarly named *Bombastic* doesn't stray too far from the original's addictive mechanics: Roll a pair of dice, try to match up numbers, and watch things explode. This would be great for Vegas, if you ask us.

[AVOID!]

BLOODY ROAR 4

Granted, neither *Virtua Fighter 4: Evolution* nor *Soul Calibur II* allows for transformation into powerful manimals, but on the other hand, *Bloody Roar 4* doesn't allow for anything beyond hyperactive button mashing. So there's that.

PC TOP 50 FINAL FANTASY ON MY COMPUTER? YEP

TITLE	PUBLISHER	WHAT WE SAY	GMR RATING
Aliens vs. Predator 2	Sierra	Three completely different first-person shooters combined into one dark and terrifying gaming experience.	9
Armed & Dangerous	LucasArts	Tea-drinking robots and guns that fire sharks. What else could you possibly ask for?	9
Baldur's Gate II: Shadows of Amn	Interplay	The rare occasion when the sequel to a classic goes above and beyond its predecessor. Can't wait for *III*.	9
Battlefield 1942	Electronic Arts	Multiplayer shooter set in WWII that lets you jump in and out of vehicles (even planes!) while battling dozens of your friends.	9
Civilization III	Infogrames	Sid Meier's classic just keeps rolling along, getting bigger and more complex while somehow managing to remain just as addictive.	10
Commandos 2	Eidos	Control a squad of elite commandos in WWII as they infiltrate, detonate, and assassinate across multiple battlefields.	8
Day of Defeat	Activision	You won't need to upgrade your videocard to play this teamplay-focused WWII shooter. What a refreshing concept.	8
Diablo II: Lords of Destruction	Blizzard	The sequel to the ultimate dungeon-crawling clickfest should please anyone who wasted their teens playing the first game.	8
Dungeon Siege	Microsoft	Hack-n-slash doesn't have to be complicated. Sometimes it can even be in beautiful 3D with no loading time between levels.	8
EverQuest	Sony Online	The MMORPG that's so addictive, it makes crack seem like Sanka. Play this game at your own risk.	9
EverQuest: Scars of Velious	Sony Online	The expansion pack to *Evercrack* opens up new worlds, new characters, and tigers with boobies (finally!).	9
Fallout Tactics	Interplay	Squad-based tactical strategy game (set in the same universe as the classic *Fallout* RPG) that sets a new standard.	9
Final Fantasy XI	Square Enix	If you possess the patience (and the money for the monthly fee), FFXI is a rewarding MMO experience.	8
Freedom Force	Electronic Arts	Clever use of strategy and RPG elements help make this witty comic-book-superhero-themed game one of the best.	10
Freelancer	Microsoft	It's not as simtastic as some might expect a PC space shooter to be, but that's part of its charm. Random missions keep the fun going.	8
Ghost Recon: Island Thunder	Ubisoft	This top-notch mission pack makes a decent modern-combat simulation into an outstanding one.	8
Giants: Citizen Kabuto	Interplay	A shooter/strategy hybrid full of weird British humor, unique and beautiful 3D graphics, and naked-lady sea monsters.	9
Grand Prix 4	Infogrames	It's a tough choice for Formula One fans; *GP4* and *F1 2002* are both worthy of your hard-earned dollars.	9
Grand Theft Auto III	Rockstar Games	The poster child for all that's wrong in gaming is chock full of all that's fun in gaming. And you get to import your own MP3s.	10
Grand Theft Auto: Vice City	Rockstar Games	The PC version of the hit game sports a higher resolution, custom MP3 soundtracks, and mouse-look for easier killin'.	10
Hitman 2: Silent Assassin	Eidos	An almost-perfect blend of action and stealth, it's a humongous improvement over the first game.	9
IL-2 Sturmovik	Ubisoft	Amazingly realistic WWII flight sim covering a region seldom visited in computer games: the Eastern Front.	9
Jedi Knight II: Jedi Outcast	LucasArts	Yeah, the lightsaber battles are sweet, but Lando's cameo just about seals the deal. And is his ship fly or what?	9
Kohan: Ahriman's Gift	Strategy First	Surprisingly accessible fantasy-themed real-time strategy game that's as much fun in single player as it is against other mages online.	9
Madden NFL 2004	Electronic Arts	New this year is the Playmaker system of adjusting plays as they happen, as well as a comprehensive Owner mode.	9
Max Payne	G.O.D.	Despite some corny writing, this überhip noir videogame feels like a movie, but plays like a great action game.	8
Medal of Honor: Allied Assault	Electronic Arts	Worth it just for the incredibly intense D-Day mission that almost matches the same scene in *Saving Private Ryan*.	9
Medieval: Total War	Activision	The ultimate historical strategy game has everything from political intrigue to sweeping real-time battles.	9
The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind	Bethesda	The definitive open-ended RPG epic. Sort of like *GTA3*, but with magic, elves, and all that *D&D* flava.	9
Motocross Madness 2	Microsoft	It's mud-splattering, off-road supercross fun with this free-wheeling dirt bike simulator from the makers of *ATV Offroad Fury*.	9
NASCAR Racing 2003	Vivendi Universal	It's the final installment of the series, and it's also the best. There's not much new, but everything's been tweaked to near perfection.	9
Neverwinter Nights	Infogrames	If you're a *D&D* nerd then you already know, but buy this one especially for the multiplayer and user-made mods.	9
Neverwinter Nights: Shadows of Undrentide	Atari	This *Neverwinter Nights* expansion has almost enough content to qualify as a new game itself.	8
No One Lives Forever	Vivendi Universal	Austin Powers ain't got nothing on Cate Archer, the hottest digital chick with a gun since that old hag Lara Croft.	9
No One Lives Forever 2	Vivendi Universal	As funny and stylish as the original '60s spy spoof (if that's even possible) and more fun to play, too.	9
Operation Flashpoint: Cold War Crisis	Codemasters	The first in the highly original series of combat sims, this soldier/flight/tank sim went on to win *CGW*'s 2001 Game of the Year award.	9
Operation Flashpoint: Red Hammer	Codemasters	Letting you play as the bad guys is the sure way into our hearts. Especially when they're nasty Rooskies.	9
Operation Flashpoint: Resistance	Codemasters	Features and content worthy of a brand-new game, this is a benchmark expansion for a classic overlooked game.	9
Rainbow Six 3: Raven Shield	Ubisoft	The command interface and character A.I. have been revamped, but it runs slowly on anything but a high-end rig.	8
Rise of Nations	Microsoft	It's not the greatest RTS game we've played, but the nation-building aspect makes *Rise of Nations* especially appealing.	8
Sacrifice	Interplay	Action/strategy hybrid defies the conventions of all the genres it touches, while making for a fantastically original multiplayer experience.	8
Shadowbane	Ubisoft	Because of these silly things called laws, the only way we can attack and capture neighboring cities is through *Shadowbane*. Look out.	8
Sid Meier's Sim Golf	Electronic Arts	*Sim Golf* will have you laying out golf courses and building resorts like a virtual Robert Trent Jones.	8
The Sims	Electronic Arts	It's impossible to categorize EA's addictive superblockbuster life simulator, just like it's impossible to stop playing it.	10
The Sims: Hot Date	Electronic Arts	Gamers everywhere, rejoice! Finally, a game where you can actually learn a thing or two about interacting with the opposite sex!	9
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004	Electronic Arts	Tiger Woods made golf cool (sort of). *Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004* makes golf games cool (sort of).	9
Tron 2.0	Buena Vista	For our younger readers, we recommend renting the original *Tron*, waiting 20 years, and then playing this game.	8
Unreal II: The Awakening	Infogrames	Somewhat of a letdown in terms of story and gameplay, but good nonetheless. Call us in five years when our gaming rigs can handle it.	8
Warcraft III: The Frozen Throne	Vivendi Universal	Adds a single-player campaign to *Warcraft III* that isn't so moody and serious. There are some new multiplayer units as well.	8
Warlords Battlecry II	Ubisoft	RTS and RPG, two great flavors that go well together—especially when combined with a big, gnarly wizard's staff!	8

[BUY!]

HOMEWORLD 2

Sierra took the *Homeworld* we all (or, more accurately, just a few of us) know and love and changed a few things. For better, balance has been improved, and the interface is *more* user-friendly. For worse, gone are the deep strategic elements. We still like it.

[AVOID!]

COMMANDOS 3

While we enjoy the new *Homeworld*, the same cannot be said for the new *Commandos*. The first two games were challenging, but not in a frustrating, want-to-kill-everyone-in-the-room sort of way. *Commandos 3* makes us want to kill everyone in the world.

XBOX TOP 50 ALL THE BULLETS OF THE AAINBOW

TITLE	PUBLISHER	WHAT WE SAY	OXM RATING
Armed & Dangerous	LucasArts	Tea-drinking robots and guns that fire sharks. What else could you possibly ask for?	9
Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance	Vivendi Universal	A beautiful-looking *Dungeons & Dragons*-based hack-n-slash that can be played cooperatively with another player.	8
Beyond Good & Evil	Ubisoft	*Rayman* creator Michel Ancel has done it again: *BG&E* is a spectacular adventure.	9
Burnout 2: Point of Impact	Acclaim	An arcade racer with an emphasis on spectacular crashes, which—now that we think about it—defeats the purpose of competitive racing.	8
Crimson Skies: High Road to Revenge	Microsoft	The single-player mode might last you a day, but the online dogfighting lasts for an eternity. Or maybe just a few months.	8
Dead or Alive 3	Tecmo	It's not the deepest of fighters, but it definitely competes for the best-looking prize. Plus, the girls are back in all their bouncy glory.	8
Dead or Alive: Xtreme Beach Volleyball	Tecmo	Pro tip: When playing *DOAXBV*, have your TV remote handy. If Mom bursts in, hit the surf button and flip to the History Channel. She'll be proud.	8
ESPN NBA Basketball	Sega	It's the best looking basketball game this year, and it's marginally the best playing one, too.	8
ESPN NFL Football	Sega	The new first-person mode is an interesting addition to a solid game of football, but it's still not enough to top *Madden*.	8
ESPN NHL Hockey	Sega	The game formerly known as *NHL2K*(x), where the (x) is the last digit of the year we're in. Oh yeah, it's still really good.	8
Grand Theft Auto: Double Pack	Rockstar Games	Containing both *Grand Theft Auto III* and *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City*, this is the value of the year. Now go get your mob on.	10
Halo	Microsoft	The definitive reason to own an Xbox. There are plenty of secondary reasons, sure, but no Xbox owner should be without *Halo*.	10
High Heat 2004	3DO	The best baseball game available this year. "Simulation" doesn't seem like a strong enough word to describe it.	8
James Bond 007: NightFire	Electronic Arts	*GoldenEye* set an impossibly high standard for the Bond license, but *NightFire* does an admirable job of re-creating the feel of the films.	8
Jet Set Radio Future	Sega	*Jet Set Radio Future* has substance and an overabundance of style. Sega simplified tagging in favor of a more robust trick system.	8
The Lord of the Rings: Return of the King	Electronic Arts	The series concludes with EA's best *LOTR* effort, an improvement on *The Two Towers* that looks fantastic.	9
Madden NFL 2004	Electronic Arts	New this year is the Playmaker system of adjusting plays as they happen, as well as a comprehensive Owner mode.	8
Max Payne	Rockstar Games	The bullet-time effect is the big draw of this action/shooter. Inspired by Hong Kong action flicks, set against a gritty New York City.	8
MechAssault	Microsoft	It's a good single-player game, but it really shines on Xbox Live, where you're pitted against other mech pilots.	8
MotoGP 2	THQ	What we said: "Can only be described as the best motorcycle-racing sim on the planet." What more do you need?	9
NBA Live 2004	Electronic Arts	Should you upgrade to the latest version of *Live*? As new announcer Marv Albert would say, "YES!"	8
NBA Street Vol. 2	Electronic Arts	Even better than the first, *Vol. 2* takes you through the legendary players and teams of the NBA's storied history. A great deal of fun.	9
NCAA Football 2004	Electronic Arts	EA took the excellent *NCAA 2003*, added some new blocking and pass-defense enhancements, and produced another winner.	8
Need for Speed Underground	Electronic Arts	All the thrills of illegal street racing without having to run from the cops. Unless you steal your copy.	9
NFL Blitz Pro	Midway	The arcade game that was based on regular football is now a regular football game based on the arcade version of regular football.	8
NHL 2004	Electronic Arts	It doesn't look as good as its competitors, but then again, you don't need to be pretty to score goals.	8
Ninja Gaiden	Tecmo	Itagaki's long-awaited and much-anticipated ode to the ninja is absolutely stunning.	9
Otogi: Myth of Demons	Sega	*Otogi* boasts some of the finest artistic touches you'll find on Xbox. Oh, the slice-and-dice, destroy-everything gameplay is fun, too.	8
Panzer Dragoon Orta	Sega	Aesthetically beautiful and a dream to play. See what Saturn owners were enjoying seven years ago (the original *Panzer Dragoon* is included).	8
Phantom Crash	Phantagram	Xbox certainly isn't lacking in mech titles. The quirky, unique *Phantom Crash* has upgradeable mechs and a story-driven one-player mode.	9
Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time	Ubisoft	This is the right way to bring back a classic...if only the camera were more manageable.	8
Project Gotham Racing 2	Microsoft	A great racer with the best implementation of online features to date. Plus, *Geometry Wars*!	9
RalliSport Challenge	Microsoft	This rally racer is one of the best examples of Xbox's power. More arcade than simulation, with enough depth to please both camps.	8
Return to Castle Wolfenstein: Tides of War	Activision	The single-player missions still aren't much to write home about, but at least you can play them with a pal. The online play is gravy.	8
The Simpsons: Hit & Run	Vivendi Universal	Holy crap! It's a good *Simpsons* game! Gamers will enjoy the fun driving missions, and fans will eat up the references.	8
SSX 3	Electronic Arts	EA ditches individual courses in favor of one giant mountain and ends up making the best *SSX* yet.	9
Star Wars Jedi Knight II: Jedi Outcast	LucasArts	As usual, the *Star Wars* universe inspires great aesthetic design to complement Raven Software's solid sense of game design.	8
Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic	LucasArts	The best thing to happen to the *Star Wars* franchise since *The Empire Strikes Back*, and the best RPG we've played in years.	10
Steel Battalion	Capcom	If you want to play this game, you have to shell out $200 for the massive controller. For those with the cash, it's well worth it.	8
Soul Calibur 2	Namco	Better than the original, but not as innovative as we would have liked. The single-player game isn't as good as *VF4: Evolution*.	9
The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind	Bethesda	An exhaustive open-ended RPG that essentially allows you to make it up as you go along, with hundreds of people to talk to.	8
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004	Electronic Arts	Tiger Woods made golf cool (sort of). *Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004* makes golf games cool (sort of).	9
TimeSplitters 2	Eidos	Everything good about the (PS2) original is here, with loads of new multiplayer options, including maps, weapons, and game modes.	8
Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six 3	Ubisoft	Tactical shooting at its almost best. Best played cooperatively over the net with some friends. Or sworn enemies.	8
Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell	Ubisoft	Comparisons to *Metal Gear Solid* were inevitable. *Splinter Cell* holds its own, and even outdoes Konami's behemoth at times.	8
Tony Hawk's Underground	Activision	The depth and versatility of *THUG*'s customizable gameplay make it the best *Hawk* yet.	10
Top Spin	Microsoft	Microsoft liked *Virtua Tennis* so much, it went and made its own version...and it's better.	8
Unreal Championship	Atari	Mindless deathmatching with great weapon design and entertaining multiplayer modes, including the sportlike Bombing Run.	8
Wakeboarding Unleashed	Activision	A surprisingly stellar extreme-sports title that manages to make the *Tony Hawk* formula work on water. Watch out for the gators.	8
World Series Baseball 2K3	Sega	*WSB2K3* is the best-looking baseball game and it has a great Franchise mode, but it's got A.I. issues that still need to be worked out.	8

[BUY!]

FREEDOM FIGHTERS

EA's squad-based shooter places you in the alternate world of Communist dominance, a much more interesting concept than *Brute Force*'s generic spacescapes. Say what you will about the former Soviet Union, at least it had some personality.

[AVOID!]

DINO CRISIS 3

We didn't go for the whole "dinosaurs...in space!" thing, which is a shame, because we're always up for concepts...in space! *Dino Crisis 3* looks very pretty, but it lacks a competent camera, keeping your viewing angles nearly unplayable.

GAMECUBE TOP 50 MARIO'S ON THE ROAD AGAIN

TITLE	PUBLISHER	WHAT WE SAY	GMR RATING
Animal Crossing	Nintendo	The game that never ends is based largely on routine chores, yard work, and interior decorating. So why is it so much fun to play?	9
Beach Spikers	Sega	Easy to pick up and easy to play, like *Virtua Tennis*. As with most arcade sports games, it's definitely better as a multiplayer affair.	8
Beyond Good & Evil	Ubisoft	*Rayman* creator Michel Ancel has done it again: *BG&E* is a spectacular adventure.	9
Billy Hatcher and the Giant Egg	Sega	Sonic Team cracked a few eggs and whipped up a great new platformer. Yeah, that was lame. Sorry.	8
Bomberman Generation	Majesco	A surviving member of the old school, *Bomberman* has earned some tenure in the industry. This time, he sports a cel-shaded look.	9
Burnout 2: Point of Impact	Acclaim	The best-looking—and best-playing—racer on the system. Be prepared to spend many hours in Crash mode.	8
Eternal Darkness: Sanity's Requiem	Nintendo	This game, if you let it, will mess with your head. The insanity effects are clever (the first time), and the scenery is downright creepy.	9
F-Zero GX	Nintendo	Unfortunately, *F-Zero GX* doesn't include vomit bags. Or the *AX* arcade machine. One of those would have been nice.	9
Harry Potter: Quidditch World Cup	Electronic Arts	J.K. Rowling's fantasy sport is surprisingly playable in videogame form. We wonder what Sega's *ESPN Quidditch* would be like....	9
High Heat 2004	3DO	The best baseball game available this year. "Simulation" doesn't seem like a strong enough word to describe it.	9
The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker	Nintendo	It looks and feels like the best *Zelda* game ever, but sailing back and forth in the overworld just feels like work.	9
The Lord of the Rings: Return of the King	Electronic Arts	The series concludes with EA's best *LOTR* effort, an improvement on *The Two Towers* that looks fantastic.	9
Madden NFL 2004	Electronic Arts	New this year is the Playmaker system of adjusting plays as they happen, as well as a comprehensive Owner mode.	9
Mario Golf: Toadstool Tour	Nintendo	The only thing missing is Mario hurling his 4-iron into the pond while screaming obscenities. Oh well, next time.	9
Mario Kart: Double Dash!!	Nintendo	The *Mario Kart* legacy remains intact, offering up a highly enjoyable co-op mode and great track design.	10
Mario Party 4	Nintendo	There are few things better in life than three friends, *Mario Party*, and a healthy flow of alcoholic beverages (if you're legal, of course).	8
Metroid Prime	Nintendo	As if they dissected *Super Metroid*, added a dimension, and put it back together again with slick graphics. In fact, it's exactly like that.	10
NASCAR Thunder 2003	Electronic Arts	It's apparently the fastest growing "sport" in America, and *Thunder 2003* is packed under the hood, including an in-depth Career mode.	9
NBA Courtside	Nintendo	No longer under the Nintendo development umbrella, Left Field's final installment of the *Courtside* series is a worthy b-ball game.	8
NBA Live 2004	Electronic Arts	Should you upgrade to the latest version of *Live*? As new announcer Marv Albert would say, "YES!"	8
NBA Street Vol. 2	Electronic Arts	Even better than the first, *Vol. 2* takes you through the legendary players and teams of the NBA's storied history. A great deal of fun.	9
NCAA Football 2004	Electronic Arts	EA took the excellent *NCAA 2003*, added some new blocking and pass-defense enhancements, and produced another winner.	9
Need for Speed Underground	Electronic Arts	All the thrills of illegal street racing without having to run from the cops. Unless you steal your copy.	9
NFL Blitz Pro	Midway	The arcade game that was based on regular football is now a regular football game based on the arcade version of regular football.	8
NHL 2004	Electronic Arts	It doesn't look as good as its competitors, but then again, you don't need to be pretty to score goals.	9
NHL Hitz Pro	Midway	It's not realistic, but it's the closest we'll ever get to a new *Ice Hockey* or *Blades of Steel*.	8
Phantasy Star Online: Episode I & II	Sega	Unhealthily addictive. The pursuit of rare items helps one ignore the somewhat repetitive battle (and the $9 monthly fee).	9
Pikmin	Nintendo	*Mario* creator Shigeru Miyamoto got the idea for this quirky strategy game from observing his personal garden. What kind of garden?	8
Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time	Ubisoft	This is the right way to bring back a classic...if only the camera were more manageable.	8
Resident Evil	Capcom	This remake could almost be described as a new game. But is it really *Resident Evil* without the laughably bad voice acting?	9
Resident Evil 0	Capcom	This one actually *is* a brand-new game, with significant changes such as droppable items and the dirty-sounding partner swapping.	8
Sega Soccer Slam	Sega	An arcade-style soccer game with off-the-wall characters, arenas, and power-ups. And it's still better than *Virtua Striker*!	8
The Simpsons: Hit & Run	Vivendi Universal	Holy crap! It's a good *Simpsons* game! Gamers will enjoy the fun driving missions, and fans will eat up the references.	8
The Sims: Bustin' Out	Electronic Arts	All the familiar goodness of *The Sims*, but now with branching career paths, two-player co-op, and more.	9
Skies of Arcadia: Legends	Sega	If you missed it on Dreamcast—and many of you did—you've been given a second chance. It's even got new characters.	8
Sonic Adventure DX	Sega	*SA2* got an upgrade, while the original *Adventure*...uh, gets a bunch of old Game Gear games. Still a classic worth revisiting, though.	7
Soul Calibur 2	Namco	Better than the original, but not as innovative as we would have liked. The single-player game isn't as good as *VF4: Evolution*.	9
SSX 3	Electronic Arts	EA ditches individual courses in favor of one giant mountain and ends up making the best *SSX* yet.	9
Star Wars Rogue Squadron II	LucasArts	At times, *Rogue Squadron II* synchs closely with scenes from the movies. Impressive when you consider it took only nine months to make.	9
Super Mario Sunshine	Nintendo	Maybe not quite as groundbreaking as *Super Mario 64* was, but even when Nintendo "misses," it makes a big splash.	9
Super Monkey Ball	Sega	Monkeys in balls! An exceptional game based on a simple concept; some of the later levels will eat you for lunch.	9
Super Monkey Ball 2	Sega	Even more monkeys in balls running around for your entertainment! The extra game modes add quite a bit to the simple concept.	8
Super Smash Bros. Melee	Nintendo	A Nintendo fanatic's dream, if only for the exhaustive gallery of collectible Nintendorabilia. Plus, you can beat the crap out of Jigglypuff.	9
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004	Electronic Arts	Tiger Woods made golf cool (sort of). *Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004* makes golf games cool (sort of).	9
Tony Hawk's Underground	Activision	The depth and versatility of *THUG*'s customizable gameplay make it the best *Hawk* yet.	10
Ultimate Muscle	Bandai	If the soap-opera antics of the WWE don't go far enough over the top, perhaps the wacky *Ultimate Muscle* will be more to your liking.	9
Viewtiful Joe	Capcom	A refreshingly original platformer/brawler with an outstanding art style and rock-solid mechanics.	9
Wario World	Nintendo	After all this time, Wario has become quite effective at reclaiming his stolen treasure. Too effective, as *Wario World* is over quickly.	7
Wave Race: Blue Storm	Nintendo	Great wave physics, awesome weather effects, and a deeper control scheme than the original. An underrated gem of a racer.	8
WWE Wrestlemania X8	THQ	Ratings have cooled and Stone Cold has had some run-ins with John Law, but that's irrelevant, as wrestling games will always sell.	8

[BUY!]

VIEWTIFUL JOE

Will we shut up already about *Viewtiful Joe*? Sorry, but no. *Viewtiful Joe* rocks, and you should buy it. Others will recognize your good taste and shower you with praise, respect, and perhaps even monetary rewards. Also, girls will fall in love with you.

[AVOID!]

KIRBY'S AIR RIDE

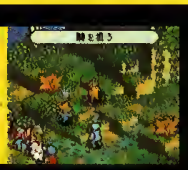
Watching Kirby fly around a course without touching the controller is awesome...awesome in the same way watching a lame anime clip of Pichu and Meowth in *Pokémon Channel* without touching the controller is awesome. That is to say, it's not.

GBA TOP 50 GOOD PLACE TO FIND NINTENDO GAMES

TITLE	PUBLISHER	WHAT WE SAY	GMR RATING
Advance Wars	Nintendo	Turn-based military strategy that should be a part of everyone's GBA library. Once you get sucked in, it's hard to pull yourself away.	8
Advance Wars 2	Nintendo	*Wars 2* only adds a single new unit, but it's chock full of new maps, new terrain, and new CO powers.	8
Baseball Advance	THQ	There are only four stadiums and no multiplayer, but it's still a great game of baseball.	8
Boktai: The Sun is in Your Hand	Konami	It's gonna be a bright (bright!), briiiiight sun-shiney day. Well, it had damn well better be.	8
Car Battler Joe	Natsume	A fun and unique car-PG that lets you build cars, add parts and weapons, and travel the world in search of your father.	7
Castlevania: Aria of Sorrow	Konami	Better sound and castle design than *Harmony of Dissonance*, but much too short. The soul system is ace, though.	8
Castlevania: Circle of the Moon	Konami	*Castlevania* is meant to be played in two dimensions, and this game shows why. A complex card system governs your special abilities.	9
Castlevania: Harmony of Dissonance	Konami	The second *Castlevania* is one of the best reasons to own a Game Boy Advance. The colors are brighter and the bosses are bigger.	9
Chu Chu Rocket!	Sega	A highly addictive and highly cute puzzle action game from Sega that's best played with multiple friends. Mouse mania!	7
Fire Emblem	Nintendo	If *Advance Wars* and *Final Fantasy Tactics* fell in love and had a baby, they'd call it *Fire Emblem*.	8
F-Zero: Maximum Velocity	Nintendo	A new *F-Zero* based on the classic SNES game, with improved graphics, new tracks, and four-player support.	8
Final Fantasy Tactics Advance	Square Enix	At long last, we have a new *Final Fantasy Tactics*—and it's absolutely spectacular. Set aside 60 hours of free time....	9
Final Fight One	Capcom	Another enhanced port of an SNES original. How come mayors of large cities don't go on ass-kicking rampages anymore?	8
Golden Sun	Nintendo	A deep combat engine and brilliant graphics make this one of the better RPGs available on GBA.	8
Golden Sun: The Lost Age	Nintendo	Picks up right where the first one left off. The battle system remains basically unchanged, but the puzzles are much more rewarding.	8
Gradius Galaxies	Konami	Konami's classic shooter series translates to the portable very well. Great graphics and plenty of challenge.	7
GT Advance 3	THQ	The *GT Advance* series has always been technically marvelous, and *GTA3* (yeah, we know) finally has a battery-save function!	8
Guilty Gear X Advance	Sammy	Not surprisingly, the animation and soundtrack take a hit, but it still plays like its big brother versions.	7
Kirby: Nightmare in Dreamland	Nintendo	A remake of the NES classic *Kirby's Adventure* with updated graphics and multiplayer support.	8
Klonoa: Empire of Dreams	Namco	Straying from the original formula, this *Klonoa* is more of a puzzle game than a platformer, with great graphics and sound.	8
Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past	Nintendo	Invite three friends and you've got a bona fide *Zelda* party. Drink red medicine till you puke and skinny-dip in Lake Hylia!	9
Lufia: The Ruins of Lore	Atlus	Perennially overshadowed by Square's offerings, the *Lufia* series is just as engaging as *Final Fantasy*. It's also more challenging.	8
Lunar Legend	Ubisoft	The anime cut-scenes and superb voice acting may be gone, but the great *Lunar* gameplay and story remain intact.	8
Mario & Luigi: Superstar Saga	Nintendo	It's the only place you'll find the Tanoomba, and that's reason enough to buy this stellar (and hilarious) RPG.	9
Mario Kart: Super Circuit	Nintendo	A balanced blend of *Super Mario Kart* and *Mario Kart 64* that even includes all the tracks from the former.	8
Mega Man and Bass	Capcom	It's hard, so very hard. But what *Mega Man* game isn't? Play as either Mega Man or wily robot Bass; each one has different abilities.	7
Mega Man Battle Network 2	Capcom	More of an RPG than an platformer, the *Battle Network* series is a nice change of pace for Mega Man and pals.	9
Mega Man Battle Network 3	Capcom	*Battle Network 3* is pretty much more of the same with a few minor additions, but it's already a great series.	8
Mega Man Zero	Capcom	A difficult yet engaging installment of the *X* side story played as Zero, who is equipped with an arm cannon and beamsaber.	7
Metroid Fusion	Nintendo	The follow-up to *Super Metroid* is eight years late, but the wait was well worth it. An adventure that ends way too quickly.	9
Ninja Five-O	Konami	A challenging platformer that brings back fond memories of *Bionic Commando*, complete with throwing stars and katanas.	9
Phantasy Star Collection	THQ	Straightforward classic RPG action that's been overlooked for far too long. Includes *Phantasy Star 1, 2,* and *3*.	9
Pokémon Ruby & Sapphire	Nintendo	Aside from two-on-two battles, the first GBA *Pokémon* combo doesn't really change the original formula.	7
Rayman Advance	Ubisoft	*Rayman* is just as good in 2D as he is in 3D. It looks great and provides a decent challenge.	8
Sonic Advance 2	THQ	*Sonic Advance 2* is much improved over the first one, and it connects to GameCube's *Sonic Adventure* games to boot.	8
Sonic Pinball Party	Sega	Not limited to just hedgehogs, Sega's solid pinballer features tables from the classics *Nights* and *Samba de Amigo*.	8
Street Fighter Alpha 3	Capcom	Sure, the limiting button configuration prevents *SFA3* from being a completely accurate port, but it's great nonetheless.	8
Super Dodgeball Advance	Atlus	You're not going to find that many dodgeball games on the market, so thankfully this one is worthwhile. Better in multiplayer.	7
Super Ghouls & Ghosts	Capcom	Remember how frustrated you got playing through *Ghouls & Ghosts*? Get ready to do it all over again.	8
Super Mario Advance: Super Mario 2	Nintendo	Aside from the odd naming system, you can't really complain about a portable version of *Super Mario Bros. 2*.	8
Super Mario Advance 2: Mario World	Nintendo	There's really not much else that can be said except "portable *Super Mario World*" and "you should buy it."	9
Super Mario Advance 3: Yoshi's Island	Nintendo	Yoshi is the star of this show, one of the greatest 2D platformers ever put to silicon. There are even a couple of new bonus levels.	9
Super Monkey Ball Jr.	THQ	An excellent port of the game that sold many a GameCube. THQ even included Monkey Bowling and Monkey Fight!	8
Super Puzzle Fighter II	Capcom	Sometimes, you just get bored with *Tetris*. *Puzzle Fighter II* is a fantastic port of a fantastic and highly addictive game. Buy it now.	8
Super Street Fighter II	Capcom	The combo of *SFA3*, *Guilty Gear X Advance*, and *Super Street Fighter II* is devastating. And you don't even need any quarters!	8
Tactics Ogre: The Knights of Lodis	Atlus	An incredibly deep strategy-RPG with a branching story line and a rewarding battle system.	8
Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 3	Activision	It's amazing how Activision managed to cram *Tony Hawk* into a cartridge while keeping the essence of the console version intact.	8
Virtua Tennis	THQ	A surprisingly faithful rendition of the console versions with good visuals and an engaging World Tour mode. The best tennis on GBA.	8
Wario Land 4	Nintendo	The *Wario* series of platformers has always been excellent, and this one is no exception. Short but incredibly sweet.	8
Wario Ware, Inc.	Nintendo	A large collection of microgames fuels *Wario Ware*'s madcap mayhem. The freshest game we've seen in a long time.	9

[BUY!]

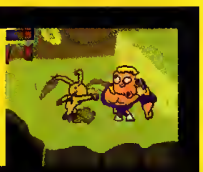
FINAL FANTASY TACTICS ADV



Newsflash: The recently announced *Final Fantasy XII* is related in certain ways to the recently released *Final Fantasy Tactics Advance*. Go ahead and pick up *Tactics*...by the time you finish roughly 1,400 hours later, *XII* should be out.

[AVOID!]

MUCHA LUCHA



¡No es bueno! This primitive wrestling game is out of place in the year 2004. We quote ourselves: "indistinct graphics, weak animation, ugly characters, and a gameplay system that fails to improve on isometric beat-em-ups from 15 years past."

GAME GEEZER

HE'S BACK! HE'S PISSED!

EVERYTHING GETS BETTEA WITH AGE—EXCEPT, MAYBE, AGING

"Hey Game Geezer! Do your cranky thing for us! Rip someone a new one!"

Ehh? What? Get out of the way, morons—comin' through.

"Whoa, hold up, Mr. Geezer! Where ya going?"

Going? I'm going home, ya idjits! I got games to play!

"Games? But, Mr. Geezer—wait! Doesn't everything suck now? Wasn't everything better back in your day, like when you walked to school barefoot in the snow and stuff?"

Ha! Better? You don't know what better is. Everything sucked back then! Everything! You ever drink Tang? You ever hear a Styx album? Bah! Don't talk to me about the "good old days." The good old days sucked! I'll take today any day.

."But, Mr. Geezer, surely you don't feel that way about videogames, right? I mean, they don't get any better than *Pong*, right?"

What are ya—deef? Whaddya think I'm saying! Of course they get better than *Pong*! Sure, not every new game is gonna be good! Not as long as the French keep makin' 'em! But still, given yer druthers now, are you gonna play *Pong* or *Counter-Strike*? *Frogger* or *SSX 3*? *Dragon's Lair* or *Knights of the Old Republic*? Go on! Answer wrong, ya smart alecks! Ya still know I'm telling the truth.

That's why I have no time for you fools this month! I've got more good games piled up now than I've had in my whole life! *Mario Kart: Double Dash*, *Prince of Persia*, *Viewtiful Joe*, *Top Spin*, *Need for Speed Underground*, *Tony Hawk's Underground*, *Call of Duty*, *Project Gotham Racing 2*, *Final Fantasy XI*, *Mario & Luigi*, *Max Payne 2*...it's endless! Between all this and my biannual husbandly duties to Mrs. Geezer, why, I got no time for anything else! Sheesh!

You're all spoiled rotten! Ya can't appreciate all the good things right in front of ya! I tell ya, if my dear old friend, er, whatshisname, the stupid-lookin' one who smelled like onions, well, maybe if he'd had *KOTOR* to keep him company late at night while lying in his foxhole in the dead of winter, trying to protect the freedom of future deadbeats like you, why—well, maybe he'd still be here today! Well, not really, of course, cuz he ended up dying that year from the clap he picked up offa that ugly old waitress he met in Hamburg! Girl had a face like a donkey! Anyway, that's not the point!

The point is this. The way I see it, games are just getting better every year, not worse. The A.I. is better, the graphics are better, the interfaces are better. We're doing things in games now that could barely be imagined six years ago! Look at the beauty of the new *Prince of Persia* and tell me you want to go back in time. Fools! I may be old and bitter, but I ain't got nothin' on you whiners!

But why am I wasting my breath? Go on—git. Go log on to your message boards and start cryin' to each other about how bad all your new games are! Just leave this miserable old man alone so he can appreciate what you lot can't.

These are the good ol' days...right freakin' now! Bah!

THESE *AAE* THE GOOD OL' DAYS... AIGHT FAEAKIN' NOW!

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TEEN
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CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Strong Language
Violence

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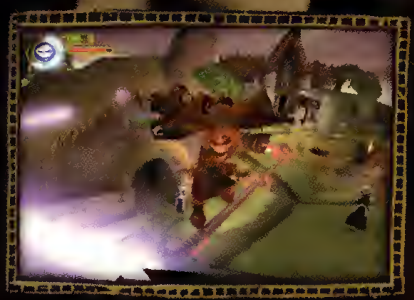

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